1323

THE MERRY PHILOSOPHER; OR, THOUGHTS ON JESTING.

Containing RULES by which a proper Judgment of JESTS may be formed; and the CRITERION for distinguishing TRUE and GENUINE WIT from that which is False and Spurious:

Together with

INSTRUCTIONS for improving the TASTE of those, who have a natural Turn for PLEASANTRY and GOOD HUMOUR.

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Now first Translated into English from the German Original.

——— *Fungar Vice Cotis; acutum*
Reddere quæ Ferrum valet, exors ipsa secandi.—
Quid deceat, quid non, quò Virtus, quò ferat Error.
HORAT.

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PREFACE.

THE circumſtance of a very learned and grave Philoſopher ſitting down to write a Treatiſe on Jeſting, and labouring with great ingenuity to reduce it to a regular art, muſt doubtleſs appear extraordinary at firſt view. But upon further reflection we ſhall find, that our ſurprize on this occaſion ariſes from the novelty of the deſign, not from its abſurdity. For as Jeſting is properly ſpeaking the ready and ſeaſonable delivery of a witty conception, ſo unleſs ſuch conception derives its birth from ſound judgment and refined taſte, it cannot with the leaſt truth or propriety be called Wit, nor can it afford entertainment to a ſenſible hearer. Now as converſation is not the only peculiar privilege, but alſo the greateſt and moſt rational pleaſure, of human Beings; and as ſprightly turns of genuine Wit conſtitute the very life and eſſence of agreeable converſation, ſurely the

the pointing out a certain method of diſtinguiſhing the true from the falſe ſpecies of humour, and the directing our ſentiments and expreſſions by the rules of ſound judgment and refined taſte, is an undertaking not unworthy the attention of a Philoſopher: undoubtedly by theſe motives alone Profeſſor Meier was excited to the taſk which he has ſo ably executed in the following pages.

To conclude; one very prevailing inducement for offering this little Treatiſe to the public in an Engliſh dreſs, was the great eſteem it was held in by the late learned Dr. Shaw, who warmly recommended it in his life-time to the peruſal of perſons of literature and taſte, as an ingenious and uſeful performance; and ſuch was his fear of loſing it, that he ſent to Germany for duplicates of the original, which were found in his library at the time of his deceaſe.

THOUGHTS ON JESTING.

INTRODUCTION.

1. AN Author, tho' without any Turn for Jeſting himſelf, may, as a Philoſopher, undertake to enquire, on ſolid Principles, into the Rules of Jeſting: As ſuch a one is ſuppoſed to have refined his Taſte by the Rules of ſound and philoſophical Criticiſm, to have acquired juſt Notions of Beauty in general, and to be well inſtructed in the Nature of Wit and Acumen in particular; juſt as he may be a proper Judge of the Beauties of a Picture, the noble Strokes of a fine Poem, the Energy and Force of a ſublime Piece of Oratory, tho' neither Painter, Poet, nor Orator. The reaſon is, Theory and Practice are not always inſeparable.

2. A Man of Wit, and a fine Genius, as ſuch, is incapable of forming a diſtinct and ſolid Judgment of the Witty, the Ingenious, the Acute, or by whatever other Name the Beautiful may be called, as being

neither a philoſophical Critick, nor underſtanding, on ſolid Principles, the Rules of Beauty. Beſides, as he deems no Conceits beautiful, but ſuch as agree with the Species of Wit himſelf affects, he abſolutely condemns whatever comes not up to his Standard. If Cicero, who, according to Quintilian, could obſerve no Meaſure in Jeſting, was to judge of a Pleaſantry, which conſiſted in a mere Equivocation, or a Playing on Words, he would not fail to admire it: becauſe ſuch was, more than became ſo great a Man, his favourite Jeſt. But a Philoſopher of a refined Taſte, as he keeps his Mind unbiaſſed and indifferent, can paſs a more impartial Judgment; can either blame, or commend, without any Kind of Prepoſſeſſion, as the Caſe ſhall require.

3. Several Exceptions were made by ſome formal gloomy Perſons to theſe Thoughts, on their firſt Publication: they accounted the Undertaking indecent and ridiculous: they imagined I ſat up for a Profeſſor of Jeſting, and publickly declared,

ed, I affected an extraordinary Turn that Way, and wanted to keep it in Exerciſe. My Pupils and my more intimate Friends can readily acquit me in this Reſpect. I muſt, however, reſt contented with the Judgment of the World, ſhould it be thought a ſtill greater indecency, that I now give an improved Edition. I only want to be thought a Whet-ſtone for ſharpening Iron, without pretending to cut.

——— *fungar vice cotis, acutum*
Reddere quæ ferrum valeat, exſors ipſa
ſecandi. HORAT.

4. Some Perſons indiſcriminately condemn all Laughter and Jeſting, as criminal; as they make no diſtinction between a moroſe and a ſerious Turn of Mind. I can eaſily foreſee, they will deem, as inconſiſtent with the Principles of Morality, a Subject, which they, in their gloomy Apprehenſions, look upon as incompatible with its Practice. As I admit, that ſeveral Jeſts are inconſiſtent with true Virtue; ſo, if impartial, they, on their Part,

muſt admit, that moroſeneſs is far from being a Virtue.

Multum ringitur otioſa Virtus.

TIDON.

Hypocrites, with the Appearance, but without the Reality of Virtue, condemn, from the Teeth outwardly, the Laughter and Jeſting, which they ſincerely approve in their Hearts. And many ſincere, virtuous Perſons alſo account them criminal, either from Temperament, Melancholy, or erroneous Principles of Morality. As the Cenſure of ſuch Perſons gives me Pain, ſo their Approbation would give me great Pleaſure. But as long as they conſider the Suggeſtions of their Temperament, deep Melancholy, and erroneous Principles, as ſo many Dictates of real Virtue; ſo long they muſt not take it amiſs, if, while I revere their Virtue, I deſpiſe their Judgment.

5. It muſt be allowed, great Offence may be given by Jeſting, and that much Circumſpection is requiſite to jeſt innocently. Some Jeſts are irreligious, coarſe, lewd, unſeemly, &c. But I am to ſhew, a happy

happy Jeſt muſt in its Nature be innocent. To determine in general, whether Jeſting be innocent, or no, it is neceſſary to examine briefly the Intention, Subject, Circumſtances, and the Nature of a Jeſt, and of the Laughter conſequent upon it. As to the Intention, a Perſon may jeſt out of Malignity, Lewdneſs, Impiety, Rancour, &c. Things no ways neceſſary to conſtitute Jeſts: And therefore we cannot condemn them in the Lump, becauſe ſometimes proceeding from criminal Intentions. The Subject of Jeſts may be Things, which ought not to be jeſted on; Things of a momentous Nature, as Religion, Virtue, Truth, &c. But as theſe are no Requiſites to a Jeſt, we cannot therefore condemn all Jeſting, becauſe of ſuch Abuſe and Miſapplication. Many Circumſtances may be improper for Jeſting, as in the Houſe of Mourning, on a Death-bed, &c. But none can be reſtrained at any Time, to jeſt unſeaſonably. In the Nature of a Jeſt, which, as I ſhall ſhew, conſiſts in an extreme fine Thought, the Reſult of a

great Wit and Acumen, which are eminent Perfections of the Soul, there can be nothing criminal. And laſtly, in Laughter, condemned by Perſons, whom Nature has neglected, having denied them the Faculty thereof, whoſe Averſion therefore to Laughter can be no Virtue; in Laughter, I ſay, beſtowed as a Prerogative on Man, above the brute Creation, there can as little be any thing criminal. In all this, I only attempt to ſet my Readers in the Train of Judging in a rational and ſolid Manner, on the Morality of Jeſting: The further Proſecution is foreign to my Purpoſe. I might however, alledge, that a harſh, diſagreeable Truth, a Reproof, can in no better Manner be couched. Many Failings and Miſcarriages deſerve a ſlight Ridicule, not a ſolemn Reprimand. A man may often make his Fortune by a happy Jeſt; or handſomely extricate himſelf out of ſome Difficulty. Mr. Waller, whom Charles II. reproached with a better Poem, made on Cromwell, than on himſelf, readily replied: 'Poets, pleaſe your Majeſty,

'are

'are happier at Fiction than Truth.' A Soldier, who, by his Bravery in the Wars, came to loſe an Arm, had a mere trifle in Money from his General. Aſtoniſhed at this, he frankly ſpoke out: 'Have I loſt 'but a pair of Gloves?' This Jeſt procured a more conſiderable Preſent.

6. The Benefits to be reaped from the Peruſal of this Treatiſe, will be: Firſt, to enable Perſons with a Turn for Jeſts, to diſtinguiſh the falſe and inſipid from the genuine and ſprightly; to ſtifle in the Birth all low and indecent Drollery; to repreſs imprudent Sallies of Wit, which ſpare not even a Boſom-friend; to prune the luxuriancies of a wild Imagination, Faults, the Wittieſt and moſt Ingenious may at Times be ſubject to. Cicero is a ſtriking Inſtance, that a fine Genius may jeſt in a wretched Manner, becauſe Jeſting too often, and not accurately enough examining his Jeſts. Publick Profeſſors in Univerſities often diſgrace themſelves by wretched Jeſts, with a View to divert their Hearers, and relieve the Severity of the profound Truths they are propoſing, by inter-

larded Jeſts. A general Treatiſe on Jeſting, may, therefore, yield uncommon Benefit to all who incline to jeſt: It will make them cautious to examine, whether a Conceit may not claſh with the Rules of Jeſting; enable them to improve their Taſte in Jeſting, and gain Reſolution enough to ſtifle all Jeſts in the Birth, which cannot ſtand the Teſt; the Abortions of a motley Wit, and which brought forth, would diſgrace the Author, and diſtaſte the Hearers.

7. A ſecond Benefit will redound to ſuch as hear or read Jeſts; they will, when thus taught, neither approve any wretched, low Jeſts, nor remain inſenſible at ſprightly; the one throwing a Slur, as bewraying a Man of low Taſte; the other reflecting an Honour, as diſcovering a refined Taſte. One may bewray the Poverty of his Wit, not only by Jeſting inſipidly, but by admiring the low Jokes of others, or being altogether inſenſible to the Fire and Sprightlineſs of a happy Jeſt.

8. The third Uſe, or Benefit, accruing from a general Diſcourſe on Jeſting, appears

pears in Oratory and Poetry, and in moſt Writings, modelled on the Rules of the fine Arts. Both Cicero and Quintilian agree in this. An Orator is often conſtrained to mention diſagreeable and dangerous Truths, and often put to confute. A lucky Jeſt may ſometimes, and that in the beſt Manner, gain theſe Ends, procure Favour with, and raiſe Admiration in the Audience, cauſe a D light, and temper a too great and ſolemn Serioufneſs, diffuſe Serenity over the Mind, thus agitated by the gentle Motions of a rational Laugh. The moſt unacceptable Truths, when ſet off with a jeſting and ſmiling Air, are heard without Reluctance: And a rallying Confutation is often more effectual than a Chain of dry and ſolemn Reaſonings: And an Antagoniſt may by a well-timed Jeſt be quite diſconcerted. The ſame may be affirmed of Poetry. A Poet has oftener Occaſion to jeſt than an Orator: His Buſineſs is Comedy, Satire, and other rallying Poems. An Orator and a Poet would diſgrace themſelves by jeſting in a wretched,

low

low Manner; conſequently, ſhould learn the Rules of Jeſting. We may expect great Advantages therefrom in all our ſocial Intercourſes. The gift of Jeſting in an ingenious Manner is, indeed, a Part of the Character of an ingenious agreeable Companion. A ſingle Perſon, with this Turn, can enliven and chear a whole Company. The Rules of Politeneſs oftentimes require it: The moſt violent Paſſions may be ſoothed by a well-applied Jeſt. On the contrary, a Perſon, by jeſting in an inſipid Manner, is quite intolerable, and always avoided and abhorred by People of fine Taſte. But I forbear enlarging; as every one, if not of a moroſe and gloomy Turn, is ſufficiently convinced of the Truth of this Obſervation; and as Experience and Knowledge of the faſhionable World abundantly confirm it. And this ſingle Benefit is enough to recommend a ſolid Diſcourſe on Jeſting, as an uſeful Work.

9. I am preſently to ſhew, that a Jeſt is a Branch of our ſenſitive Knowledge, and the Expreſſion of that Knowledge, or a ſenſitive Diſcourſe, produced by the inferior

rior cognoſcitive Faculties of the Soul, in particular, by the ſenſitive Wit, and ſenſitive Acumen or Penetration. I ſhall alſo ſhew, that it is no otherwiſe diſtinguiſhed from Buffoonry and indecent Drollery, but by its Conformity to the Rules of the Beauty of our ſenſitive Knowledge. And thus it is a Part, which is within the Province of the fine Arts: And a Reſearch into the Perfections thereof muſt be conſidered as a Branch of what is called the Æſthetic.* Ever ſince this particular Science, the Æſthetic, has been diſcovered to the World, it has had the Fate of being expoſed to very unfavourable Cenſures. An innocent Stranger has been calumniated, becauſe not ſufficiently known: And its Fate has been that of many a charming Beauty, to be hiſſed and exploded: A Treatment owing either to a natural Incapacity, to feel the Powers of Beauty; or to an Itch of Calumny, without Reſerve, without Proof, aſſenting to lying Reports; or to a want of a more intimate Acquaintance,

* Our ſenſitive Knowledge reduced to diſtinct philoſophical Principles.

ance, from her not ſufficiently diſplaying her Charms. But be this as it may, we are not to rate a Science by the different Judgments of the Vulgar. The Æſthetic is a Science, which in general treats of our ſenſitive Knowledge, and of the Expreſſion of that Knowledge: It examines into the Perfections and Imperfections of this ſenſitive Knowledge, and of this Expreſſion: It deduces the Rules, by the Obſervation of which the former may be obtained, and the latter avoided: It ſhews in what Manner the inferior cognoſcitive Faculties are to be improved and employed, in order both to think and to ſpeak finely: And it ſupplies us with the Grounds, or Principles, by which we may in a juſt and rational Manner paſs a Judgment on the ſeveral Species of ſenſitive Knowledge and the Expreſſion thereof. It is therefore evident, that the whole of the Enquiry into the Rules of Jeſting muſt be founded on the Principles of the Æſthetic, in order to its being, in other Reſpects, juſt and ſolid. The general Rules for all fine Thoughts muſt alſo

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neceſſarily be the Rules for ſprightly Jeſting: For ſuch Jeſts are nothing other, but fine Thoughts.

10. We ſay, that we paſs a Judgment on a Thing, when we diſcover its Perfections or Imperfections, or both, at the ſame Time, and accordingly judge. Now, if this is done in a ſenſitive Manner, it is called a ſenſitive Judgment, or a Judgment by the Taſte. The Taſte, or ſenſitive Faculty of Judging, is that Power, by which we judge of Perfections or Imperfections; yet ſo as to have no diſtinct Knowledge either of the Perfections or Imperfections; nor in a diſtinct Manner to deduce the Judgments, paſſed upon them, from diſtinctly known Principles philoſophically. Perfections, ſo far as they are known in an indiſtinct and ſenſitive Manner, are called Beauties; and Imperfections, ſo far as they are known in the very ſame Manner, are called Deformities. The Taſte is therefore that cognoſcitive Faculty, by which we are appriſed of, and feel Beauties and Deformities, and judge of them by this bare Feeling.

ing or Perception. And thus the Taſte is the Judge, before whoſe Tribunal comes of Courſe to be diſcuſſed, whether a Thing be beautiful or not; whether deformed, or not. Now as a Jeſt is a ſenſitive Repreſentation and Diſcourſe, its Perfections are to be called Beauties, juſt as its Imperfections are to be called Deformities. And thus the paſſing a Judgment on Jeſts comes under a Juriſdiction, wherein the Taſte preſides, as Judge. And if by a Critick we underſtand in general one capable of forming a Judgment of Perfections and Imperfections, or one endowed with a proper Ability to judge, we muſt affirm, that whoever can paſs a Judgment on a Jeſt, muſt be a good Critick. Experience confirms this: As it is always an indication of a vitiated and low Taſte, either to jeſt in an inſipid Manner oneſelf, or to approve the low, inſipid Jeſts of others; and on the contrary, always a Proof of a refined Taſte, never to jeſt but in a ſprightly Manner, and never to approve but ſprightly Jeſts. Now if we reflect on the many

Quali-

Qualifications requiſite to form an able Critick, and how dangerous it is to truſt one's Taſte, it will be eaſily ſeen, it is not quite ſo eaſy a Matter to form a rational Judgment of a Jeſt. I have often with pleaſure enjoyed myſelf in Silence, when preſent in a large Company, where People jeſted. If any one utters a wretched Pun, himſelf is ſure to laugh heartily, and with eager Eyes to ſurvey the Company round, as if inviting them to join him, and thus declare their Approbation: And how often have I obſerved a large Company laugh heartily at a wretched Jeſt? A perſon of Wit attempts, a few moments after, an uncommon ſprightly Jeſt; and it is heard without any Emotion, or even a Smile: he ſhall be even aſked to explain it; and when explained, the Dullards at length take it: But a Jeſt is ſpoiled, the Moment it muſt be commented on.

11. As I admit the paſſing a Judgment on a Jeſt to be the Buſineſs of Taſte, it might be objected, I attempt a fruitleſs Labour, as there are no Rules for Taſte, and

and every one is to be left to his own Way in this Reſpect, and that there is no diſputing about Taſte an Expreſſion become proverbial, and by many deemed a perfectly well-grounded Rule. I readily allow, no Diſpute about Judgments on Taſte muſt be engaged in, ſo long as we judge barely by the Taſte. In that Caſe we judge by bare Senſations and other indiſtinct Perceptions, which we neither rightly underſtand, nor can well explain; the Grounds and Principles of which we can neither aſſign, nor properly define. And how wretched muſt a Diſpute be, in which neither of the contending Parties can advance proper Grounds or Principles! When the one ſays, this pleaſes me, who can reaſonably queſtion it? And when the other ſays, it does not pleaſe me, when it actually does not; can we pretend to diſpute all this? But it is quite different, when, on proper Principles, we attempt to enquire, whether this Pleaſure or Diſpleaſure is juſt and well-grounded or no. As long therefore, as the Judgments of the Underſtanding are not conjoined with

with thoſe of the taſte, and no attempt made to change the latter into diſtinct philoſophical judgments, or into thoſe of the underſtanding; ſo long is it a vain and idle attempt to engage in a diſpute about beauties and deformities. And then there may be ſeveral ſubjects ſo trifling, as not to be worth while to diſpute about; and would only diſcover a ſilly pride in attempting to bring the taſte of others to a conformity with our own. But if a thing of importance, the judgment of the taſte muſt, in conſequence of the ſuperior judging faculty, or the underſtanding, be brought to the teſt of rules. This is a higher tribunal, to which there lies an Appeal from the bar of taſte. We are to analyſe or unfold the judgments of the taſte, tranſform them into diſtinct judgments, and enquire into their grounds or principles. For, the ſenſitive and confuſed repreſentations or ideas, ſuch as are the judgments of the taſte, can no otherwiſe be juſt, but as they repreſent to us at once, and combined together, all that the diſtinct judgments

of the underſtanding exhibit ſeparately and diſtinguiſhed from each other. We may and ought therefore to paſs a judgment on taſte itſelf, and aſſign rules, by which it is to be directed in its judgments. And though it be ridiculous in a Critick to oppoſe, in a critical diſpute, nothing but his own taſte to the taſte of another; yet it is poſſible, and even neceſſary to eſtabliſh diſtinct rules in matters even of taſte. And thus there are not only rules for jeſting, but rules that are alſo very uſeful. To which we may add, that beauties are perfections; and no perfection is attainable, or capable of taking place, without rules for the purpoſe. So far as theſe rules are obſerved, ſo far beauty is obtained; but ſo far as they are neglected, ſo far deformity is the conſequence. And thus a perſon would betray his ignorance, who ſhould diſpute the poſſibility of aſſigning rules for jeſting.

12. Now as it is undeniable, there are rules aſſignable for the perfection of jeſts, to which they muſt be conformed, and by

by which they are to be judged of, §. 11. ſo it would be unreaſonable to doubt, whether alſo there are ſufficient or adequate grounds or principles, from which theſe rules flow, and by which we may be ſecure of their truth. Every thing has its ſufficient ground or reaſon: A propoſition ſo univerſal as to compriſe the whole extent of things, both poſſible and actual; from which undoubtedly the rules for jeſting are not to be excluded. Whoever would, in general, give thus a ſolid treatiſe on jeſting, muſt inveſtigate the genuine principles of the rules for jeſting, and from theſe alone deduce the rules. By an oppoſite conduct he might be in danger of aſſuming falſe rules; and in that caſe commend wretched jeſts, and cenſure excellent ones; and as much as in him lay, deprave the taſte of the world, tho' intending to improve it. Let us in general enquire into theſe grounds or principles: which I reckon to conſiſt of the following: 1. The rules of perfection in general, or the genuine notions of a real per-

fection and imperfection. What in general is no perfection, can never conſtitute a perfection in a jeſt. And whatever is requiſite to the eſſence of a perfection in general, or without which a perfection cannot exiſt, is alſo a requiſite to a happy jeſt. 2. I here reckon the general rules of the perfection of the ſenſitive knowledge, and of its expreſſion: or, the genuine notions of the beauty or deformity of a ſenſitive diſcourſe: What in general is no beauty in this laſt, can never be a beauty in a jeſt. Whatever therefore is abſolutely neceſſary to the beauty of a ſenſitive diſcourſe, is alſo a neceſſary requiſite in a happy jeſt. 3. I include under this head, the perfections and imperfections of the ſenſitive, or the inferior cognoſcitive powers of the ſoul: in particular the ſenſitive wit and acumen. The whole of a jeſt is the effect of theſe powers: And the effect is either perfect or imperfect, in proportion to the exertion of the efficient cauſe, producing it either in a more perfect or imperfect manner. A perfect jeſt

muſt

muſt be produced by perfect cognoſcitive powers; ſo that theſe powers ſhall, in producing it, be exerted in a perfect manner. And theſe are the genuine, proximate ſources, from which the beauty of a jeſt neceſſarily flows, and from which the rules for the perfection of a jeſt are to be derived.

13. We may now juſtly affirm, there is a ſcience or art of jeſting, conſiſting in a diſtinct, ſolid and learned knowledge of the rules for jeſting; or, in a philoſophical knowledge of the rules, whereby a jeſt may be invented and expreſſed or uttered, and by which it may obtain the higheſt degree of perfection poſſible. For, there are rules of jeſting, §. 11. Theſe rules have their juſt, undoubted principles in nature, §. 12. And can it any longer be deemed impoſſible, to deduce, in a ſolid and diſtinct manner, theſe rules from theſe principles? And if not, it muſt be allowed, there is an art and ſcience of jeſting. Cicero and Quintilian ſeem to contradict me in this, as they would appear to deny it. But upon examining their reaſons, they prove nothing leſs

than the reverſe of what I hold: neither of them having ever denied, in the ſenſe I maintain, an art of jeſting. They only ſay, that a man, merely by dint of art, can never attain to a happy knack of jeſting; that nature and opportunity muſt contribute the greateſt ſhare thereto. Of this I am fully convinced, as I ſhall ſhew more diſtinctly. But as little as we can deny an artificial logick, becauſe a good natural genius is prerequired thereto; or an art of muſick, painting, &c. becauſe, without a natural aptitude, none, barely by dint of art, can become an excellent muſician, painter, &c. juſt as little can we reaſonably deny an art of jeſting, though, with all the rules of this art, none, who have not a natural turn or aptitude for it, can ever acquire the knack of jeſting. Art, without nature, can avail nothing; but therefore art is not a thing impoſſible.

14. I diſtinguiſh from the ſcience, or art, the natural gift of jeſting, which conſiſts in an aptitude and a due proportion of the inferior cognoſcitive powers, ſo as in a ſtrik-

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ing manner to qualify a perſon for jeſting happily. This gift is very early obſerved in ſome: many are without it, even fine geniuſes; as all ſuch may not have an equal ſtock of all the fine thoughts. Whoever has the gift of jeſting happily, is doubtleſs a fine genius; but the converſe holds not true.

15. In order to form a juſt notion of the art of jeſting, as ſtanding related to the natural gift, the following conſiderations are neceſſary to be premiſed. 1. By mere dint of art it is not poſſible to jeſt in a happy manner: or, whoever is unfurniſhed by nature, can never ſucceed in jeſting, though perfectly maſter of the art; which is barely the hand-maid to nature; and in order to be genuine and juſt, muſt be founded on nature. It would therefore be in vain to write on the art of jeſting, with a view to teach perſons, diſqualified by nature; a defect no ways peculiar to the art of jeſting: the ſame thing holds good of the arts of logick, muſick, dancing, poetry, &c. All which preſuppoſe a natural aptitude or turn in

the perſons to be inſtructed, and without it they cannot in ſo proper a manner underſtand the art. 2. The art of jeſting does not enjoin, that whoever will jeſt happily, muſt on every occaſion recollect the ſeveral rules, and ſollicitouſly adjuſt his jeſts by them: Such jeſts could not fail of being wretched, if deviſed in ſo affected a manner by a ſtudied preparation. A happy jeſt muſt ariſe in a moment, without any affected reſearch, as will appear from what follows. And this is a thing common to all the arts. He would prove but a wretched philoſopher, who in each definition, each ſyllogiſm, each demonſtration, muſt particularly recollect the logical rules. A genuine philoſopher acquires the readineſs or habit to obſerve the rules of logick, without a particular recollection of them. A novice in grammar, indeed, muſt at firſt recollect the grammatical rules. But in time he comes to obſerve them without a particular recollection; and ſo of all other arts: they in time become a ſecond nature. The art of jeſting muſt, in like manner, give our wit,

wit, our acumen or penetration, and the whole of the natural gift, the proper biaſs and tendency to become a ſecond nature. 3. The mere natural gift, unaſſiſted by art, always produces wretched jeſts: juſt as a tract of land turns to a wild, or deſart in time, if left uncultivated by art. Nature works her productions only to the rough, and conſigns them over to us unpoliſhed and unwrought, leaving to art the care of working them to full perfection. Whoever neglects the rules of art, falls into one fault, while he is labouring to avoid another. Experience confirms this: all drolls, merry-andrews, &c. plainly ſhew, nature has beſtowed on them an extraordinary gift for jeſting: and they want nothing but the rules of art to finiſh them. They are like a wild tree, that never came under the knife of a ſkillful gardener: its fruit is naught and good for nothing. 4. The art of jeſting is to be in aid of the natural gift, to improve it, give it a proper biaſs and direction. It diſtinctly and in order propoſes the rules; is a touch-ſtone, on which to

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try jeſts; a pattern, after which to copy; till gradually the habit to jeſt happily is acquired, without any recollection of the particular rules of art. And were we thus to take two men, for inſtance, naturally with an almoſt equal turn for jeſting; one of whom is inſtructed in the art; the other not; it is undeniable, the former will jeſt much more happily than the latter. And thus to improve and promote the natural gift, is the moſt important uſe the art of jeſting can promiſe. Whoever expects more from it, deceives himſelf: and ſhould he therefore revile the art, he behaves both unſeemly and unjuſtly; and has reaſon rather to reproach himſelf, for acting in ſo fooliſh and prepoſterous a manner, in expecting from the art an uſe, it is naturally incapable of yielding: but much more does he diſcover his folly, in deeming it therefore altogether uſeleſs.

16. I own my deſign in theſe ſheets is to write on the art of jeſting, at leaſt to make an eſſay towards it. My view is to give perſons of taſte a kind of manuduc-

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tion, by which they may come to diſtinguiſh between a mean and a ſprightly jeſt; with directions for all ſuch as have a natural turn, how to improve their talent, and carry it to a due perfection. I am conſtrained to mention this, on the behaviour of ſome Criticks, who are reſolved to find fault, were it but to charge a writer with a deſign he never entertained.

17. In order to illuſtrate the rules by examples, I ſhall borrow jeſts from a French collection, publiſhed at Paris, in 1703. However, it is always a nice and tickliſh affair, to give inſtances of jeſts, and recommend them as ſuch. A jeſt may pleaſe one, which diſpleaſes another; make one laugh, while another keeps his countenance. And I cannot hope to pleaſe all in this reſpect: but in order to ward off, as much as may be, all unjuſt cenſure, I ſhall only obſerve, that when I commend any thing in a jeſt, I am not to be underſtood to approve the whole of it. A jeſt has various perfections, not always meeting together in the ſame jeſt. A jeſt, therefore, may in one

one reſpect be fine, in another, mean; have more imperfection than perfection; or the reverſe. And thus different readers may come to conſider the ſame jeſt from different points of view.

18. But it is time I conclude the introduction: I ſhall now addreſs myſelf to the enquiry itſelf. And as my intention is, ſolidly to demonſtrate the rules, and deduce them from genuine principles; I muſt diſtinctly propoſe ſome truths, and give ſome definitions, previous to the enquiry itſelf.

CHAP.

CHAP. I.

DEFINITION OF A JEST.

IN what follows I am to ſhew, that a jeſt is principally a creature of the ſenſitive wit and acumen; I muſt therefore, define, what I mean by wit and acumen. Nature has beſtowed on us a faculty, by which we can perceive the agreement of one thing with another. Now as things are ſaid to agree mutually, when they are in quantity and qualities the ſame; to this their agreement we are to rank all reſemblances, equalities, and proportions. Wit is the readineſs or habit to diſcover the agreement of things; and thus their reſemblances or ſimilitudes, their equalities and proportions; and is divided into the ſenſitive and rational wit. The ſenſitive wit conſiſts in the readineſs or habit of repreſenting the agreements of things in an indiſtinct and ſenſitive manner. But the rational

tional wit, in the habit of diſcovering the reſemblances of things in a diſtinct manner. By this laſt ſpecies of wit we gain, for inſtance, abſtract notions, by means of logical rules, ſeparated or abſtracted from others, all of them conſiſting in a diſtinct repreſentation of the agreement of ſeveral other notions. But when Horace makes Lydia ſay:

Quanquam Sidere pulchrior
Ille eſt, tu levior cortice, & improbo
Iracundior Adria;
Tecum vivere amem, tecum obeam libens.

he in a ſenſitive manner repreſents the reſemblance of the beauty of Calais, with the beauty of a conſtellation; that of levity, with the bark of a tree; and the reſemblance of ſudden anger, with the raging of the Adriatic: theſe are therefore repreſentations or ideas of the ſenſitive wit. All repreſentations and diſcourſes, produced by the wit, whether the ſenſitive or rational, are ingenious or witty repreſentations and

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diſcourſes. But here we underſtand the repreſentations and diſcourſes, produced by the ſenſitive wit alone.

20. We have naturally a faculty to perceive the differences of things; whether differences of the quantities or qualities of them. Under differences are implied diſſimilitudes, inequalities, diſproportions, &c. The acumen, or penetration, is the habit to diſcover differences or diſtinctions: and whoever can readily perceive theſe differences, is acute. Diſproportions conſiſt in the differences of the relations or habitudes of the quantities of different things, mutually compared. We divide acumen, as we did wit, into the ſenſitive and rational. The ſenſitive, is the habit to diſcover differences in a ſenſitive and indiſtinct manner: the rational, the habit to diſcover differences in a diſtinct manner. Repreſentations and diſcourſes therefore, produced by the acumen, are called acute. By an acute wit we mean wit combined with acumen, or the habit compoſed of both: and is either ſenſitive or rational.

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21. The perfection of our knowledge is grounded on the perfection of the cognoſcitive faculty exerted in producing it. In order properly to judge of the beauty of a jeſt, we muſt enquire into the perfection of the acute wit, or the wit and acumen combined, as the faculty which produces jeſts. The perfections of a cognoſcitive faculty depend either on the number of the things which it exhibits, or on the manner in which it does ſo, or in the force or vigor it exerts. The greater number of things it is capable of exhibiting, the greater the perfection, the more difficult the knowledge of them; and yet with the greater advantage and vigour the faculty can exhibit them, alſo the more perfect the faculty. And then there is in this caſe a greater variety in the faculty; which variety, however, conſpires or tends to one end, namely that of the faculty itſelf, which in this caſe is knowledge, and in this tendency or conſent, perfection conſiſts.

22. The degrees of perfection of the ſenſitive wit depend on different principles: ſo

ſo much the greater and more perfect is it. 1. As it diſcovers the agreement or coincidence of a greater number of ideas; whether gradually and at different times, or at one ſingle time in one ſingle witty thought: an efficient cauſe is ſo much the greater, the greater number of effects it produces. Wit, adorned with this perfection, has an extenſive compaſs and a large ſphere of action, wherein it may exert itſelf. 2. As the objects compared are more important and excellent: ſome things are ſo trifling and unbecoming as not to be worth the trouble of diſcovering their coincidences. 3. As the objects are leſs familiar; but yet if capable inſtantly to diſcover their agreement, the wit muſt be exceedingly penetrating and active. 4. As the objects are more conſiderably different: things almoſt the ſame, and whoſe diverſity lies latent and unobſerved, have a palpable agreement, which may be eaſily diſcovered, and with very little wit: but in thoſe very different, the agreement is more concealed and harder to be come at,

their manifeſt diverſity ſo taking up the attention as to divert it from obſerving their agreement. And if notwithſtanding thoſe impediments, the wit can diſcover the agreement, it muſt be great and perfect. 5. As the more agreements and reſemblances are diſcovered on comparing different ideas, the greater and more perfect the wit. 6. As the agreements, reſemblances, &c. are greater and more important. 7. As the wit in a clearer and more lively manner exhibits agreements of things. 8. As the repreſentations of coincidences or agreements are juſter, the more perfect is the wit. 9. As the more certain and convincing the repreſentations, the greater is the wit. 10. As the more ſtriking and agreeable the repreſentation is. 11. As amidſt a greater number and multiplicity of other different ideas, the wit can notwithſtanding dicover coincidences, the ſtronger and more vigorous is it. When we want to diſcover coincidences, and are long employed in the diſcovery of them, to the excluſion of every other thought; this

this is but a poor way of diſcovering them. But when without any previous preparation, any laborious and long reſearch, amidſt the tumult and hurry of of other ideas, a perſon can diſcover coincidences, his wit muſt be extremely active and lively, and conſequently ſo much the more perfect.

23. I chooſe not to dwell ſo long on examining the ſeveral degrees of the ſenſitive acumen or penetration; which differs from the ſenſitive wit only as to its object; the wit being employed about the diſcovery of coincidences or agreements, and the acumen on that of the differences of things which in other reſpects are alike. Conſequently, the acumen is the greater and more perfect the more various and important the differences, the more difficult to be diſcovered, and the more lively, juſt, certain and ſtriking the differences are exhibited, and the leſs preparation precedes the diſcovery. The degrees of perfection of the wit and acumen, taken together, conſtitute the degrees of perfection of the acute wit.

Some of my readers may poſſibly be tired with theſe diſquiſitions, and complain of their obſcurity and dryneſs. But there is no remedy for it: the reader requires either a ſolid and philoſophical diſquiſition on jeſting, or a bare collection of agreeable and jocoſe conceits: if the laſt, he may ſuperſede the reading my book; I write not for him; and thus once for all take my leave of him: but if the firſt, he muſt allow me to eſtabliſh certain principles, from which to deduce the rules of jeſting; and this I have done thus far from §. 19.

24. I can now on ſufficient grounds affirm, what I mean by a jeſt. Quintilian juſtly ſays, nature contributes the greateſt ſhare to a good jeſt, by imparting an acuteneſs and readineſs at finding a jeſt: he requires an acumen, and expreſsly defines a jeſt, *Sermo cum riſu aliquos inceſſens*, a diſcourſe exciting to laughter or ridicule. Cicero agrees in this, as he aſſerts, that a jeſt muſt, in its nature, be adapted, and the deſign of it be, to excite laughter. We call merry and jocoſe, whatever moves

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our laughter. Now from the inſtances adduced by Quintilian and Cicero, and on attending to their diſquiſitions on jeſts, we may eaſily perceive, that the latter are produced by the ſenſitive wit and acumen combined, and muſt be adapted to produce laughter. We muſt diſtinguiſh between a conceit, an ingenious conceit, and a jeſt. A conceit is a ſhort, witty, acute thought. If fine in a ſupreme degree, or produced by a perfect ſenſitive wit and acumen, and thus capable of cauſing an unexpected pleaſure, it is an ingenious conceit, *Bon mot*: an ingenious conceit, capable of producing laughter, is a jeſt. By a jocoſe or merry ſpeech I mean a ſhort ſpeech, expreſſing a jeſt: and thus a jeſt muſt be a ſenſitive fine thought, be conciſe, and produced by a high degree of wit and acumen, and exhibit ſomething ridiculous, or be adapted to cauſe laughter. I diſtinguiſh jeſts from jeſting or jocoſe ſpeeches; a jeſt is the thought unexpreſſed; and to expreſs the jeſt happily, peculiar rules are requiſite. Diogenes the Cynick coming once to a very ſmall, inconſiderable

town, with very large and magnificent gates, he told the inhabitants "to ſhut their gates, "leſt the town ſhould run out." This jeer or banter implies a jeſt, ingeniouſly laying open the ridicule ariſing from a gate too large for a town ſo ſmall. Lewis XIV. obſerving two courtiers riding full ſpeed one after the other; the foremoſt with an uncommon long chin, the hindmoſt with ſcarce any at all; the King aſked whither they were driving at ſuch ſpeed? M. de Clerambaut replied: 'The hindmoſt is in 'purſuit of the foremoſt, to recover his 'ſtolen chin.' Here again it is evident, that the ridiculous circumſtance, *viz.* a perſon with little or no chin, purſuing another with a very large one, is ingeniouſly repreſented by a compariſon with a theft. And thus I hope, I have ſufficiently cleared my definition of a jeſt.

25. For a fuller conviction of the juſtneſs of my definition, I will diſtinguiſh a jeſt from three things. 1. From ingenious and acute ſpeeches, of ſome length; as a Poem is; but no one will therefore call

call it a jeſt, even though the reading provokes to laughter: a witty ſatire, a comedy may cauſe abundance of laughter; but the whole poem cannot therefore be called a jeſt: and for this reaſon I have defined a jeſt, a ſhort thought, or ſhort ſpeech. Whoever runs into any length in a jeſt, ſpoils it: a jeſt muſt be perfectly rounded, or comprized in one ſingle ſhort period.

2. From ingenious and acute conceits: all jeſts are ingenious conceits; but a conceit may be very ingenious, and yet cannot be called a jeſt, as being incapable to cauſe laughter. A perſon may diſcover a great deal of wit, and much acumen, and often propoſe the moſt ingenious conceits, affording the hearers a high degree of pleaſure; but yet we cannot always ſay he jeſts. Henry IV. of France wanted to ſlide, as his courtiers did, on the frozen Seine, the Marſhal de Baſſompierre diſſuaded the King; who replied, "All the courtiers ſlide, "and are come to no harm:" Your Majeſty, returned the Marſhal, "is one of greater weight than them all." I know not whether

any one could laugh at this ingenious conceit: the Marſhal wanted to ſhew, that a King muſt never run himſelf into danger, the avoiding which would be ridiculous and an effeminate conduct in any other; and thus compared the moral weight of the King's perſon, with his corporal weight capable of cruſhing or breaking through the ice. The Doge of Venice, being obliged to come to Verſailles, to appeaſe, in the name of the Republick, the King's diſpleaſure; after viewing all the curioſities of that magnificent palace, was aſked by a courtier, what he ſaw moſt extraordinary, and worthy his admiration in Verſailles; he anſwered, "to ſee himſelf there." This conceit is uncommonly ingenious, but would very unjuſtly be called a jeſt. 3. From the ridiculous in general, or from that which moves to laughter. The ridiculous in itſelf is no jeſt; but the ingenious and acute repreſentation of it is ſuch. It is ſufficient to a jeſt, if it excites laughter: this is its proximate end; it may, beſides, have ſeveral others. For inſtance, the telling a truth

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in jeſt, in order to cure ſeveral little defects, &c. Laughter may be prevented by ſeveral cauſes, and a jeſt may be ſprightly, though actually not cauſing laughter, which may be repreſſed by a great degree of ſeriouſneſs, or from ſeveral other cauſes. And on the contrary, one may juſtly laugh at numberleſs things which are no jeſts: as at the follies of others, their affectation, their ſtupidity. A perſon may laugh at ſeeing another fall, though near breaking his neck: but who would affirm, that the perſon jeſts? Therefore every thing ridiculous is not a jeſt. And it is a capital remark in the doctrine of jeſting, not to imagine a perſon always jeſts when he makes others laugh. A Roman Catholick Prieſt was called to baptize a child, but having drank too freely before, was ſo muddled he could not find the ſervice for baptiſm in the Maſs-book: and while he was fumbling over the leaves for that purpoſe, he ſaid: "Ah! "this child is very hard to be chriſtened" One may ſay the Prieſt made a jeſt: but when I tell this ſtory, though a man

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muſt be very ſerious not to laugh, yet I have made no jeſt.

26. The perfections and imperfections, or the beauties and deformities of jeſts, are of two ſorts: the firſt may be called the material beauties and deformities of jeſts; which chiefly depend on the objects of the jeſts; or on the things and perſons jeſted on, and the ridicule of which is exhibited in an ingenious and acute manner. And in this view, jeſts may be divided innumerable ways: we may jeſt either on important, or on little and minute matters; on things, which it is allowable, and on things, which it is criminal to jeſt on: we may jeſt barely for pleaſure or mirth's ſake; and may alſo intend to banter either a perſon, or his actions, behaviour, &c. with other the like conſiderations, which may be made on the ſubject matter of jeſts. And hence jeſts may be divided into innocent and criminal. An innocent jeſt is ſuch as implies nothing criminal; but if it does, it ceaſes to be innocent. Criminal jeſts are denominated from the duties we tranſgreſs in jeſting;

jeſting; and may be atheiſtical or irreligious, when againſt our duty to God: coarſe, clowniſh, rude, when contrary to the duties of civility: indecent, lewd, when in contradiction to the duties of modeſty; on the contrary, what is a polite, ſeemly and decent jeſt, is evident. A Roman Catholick Lady praying in a ſolemn manner to a Saint for the converſion of her huſband, in four days after the huſband died; upon which ſhe ſaid, 'How great is the goodneſs of this Saint! who grants me more than I prayed for.' Waving other conſiderations, this jeſt is criminal, as it is contrary to the love a wife owes her huſband. The deſign in a jeſt may be alſo conſidered, excluſive of its cauſing laughter; and then again ſeveral ſorts of jeſts may be diſtinguiſhed. I will mention only the ſatirical, which at the ſame time contain a ſevere jeſt, or a banter, on one who juſtly deſerves it. As Henry IV. of France was going to walk in the gallery in the Louvre, he met a Gentleman, that had been viewing the palace, but did not know the King; who

who aſked the Gentleman, whom he belonged to: he anſwered, 'to myſelf,' the King returned, 'you have a fool then, for your 'Maſter.' And therefore, in order to judge fully of a jeſt, its material perfections and imperfections muſt be conſidered: as any one may plainly ſee, that a jeſt is to be rejected, which, for inſtance, is mere ribaldry, as wounding the laws of chaſtity.

27. The ſecond ſpecies of perfections and imperfections of a jeſt, I will call its formal beauties and deformities. Theſe principally depend on the nature or quality of the jeſts, without any reference to their object; or on their adaption to their end, namely, exciting laughter, and are acute and witty thoughts. In this reſpect, a jeſt is fine and beautiful, when exhibiting the ridiculous in the object in a perfect manner: and in the oppoſite caſe, deformed or ſhocking, whether exhibiting ſomething ridiculous, which the object has not, or the ridiculous in a poor and imperfect manner. Both theſe ſpecies of perfections and imperfections are not at all times found together.

ther. A jeſt may have, at the ſame time, the firſt ſpecies of perfections, and the ſecond of imperfections : as alſo the firſt ſpecies of imperfections, and the ſecond of perfections. §. 26. It is well known, that many will jeſt on things which it is no crime to jeſt on, and yet the jeſt be very poor. I ſhall in what follows, have ſufficient opportunity to adduce inſtances both of theſe beauties and deformities of jeſts.

28. Jeſts may therefore be divided into happy and unhappy. The happy may be alſo called beautiful, fine and ingenious: and ſuch are all perfect jeſts, or thoſe ſet off with the beauties of both ſpecies. A jeſt, which in a very eminent and remarkable degree is beautiful, is called a ſprightly glowing jeſt. On the contrary, an unhappy, coarſe, and awkward jeſt, is ſuch as is deficient in proper beauty; and a jeſt, which in a higher and more eminent degree is imperfect, is called an inſipid, or a frigid jeſt. Theſe diviſions require at preſent no further illuſtration or confirmation. The proximate end I propoſed to myſelf in

executing this work, conſiſted in eſtabliſhing rules, by which we may, on ſolid grounds, diſtinguiſh between the happy and the unhappy jeſts; and in every caſe that offers, diſcover, whether a jeſt is happily conceived and expreſſed, or not; and by which we muſt in all reſpects conduct ourſelves, in order to ſucceed in jeſting, and not be diſgraced and expoſed to laughter by frigid conceits.

29. The perfections and imperfections of jeſts have a threefold ſource, from which they naturally flow. 1. The perfection and imperfection of the acumen or penetration by which they are produced: a corrupt tree tree never brings forth good fruit. Conſequently, the more perfect the acumen, and in the more eminent degree, conformably to its perfection, it has exerted itſelf in the production of a jeſt, the finer it is. The more imperfect, on the contrary, the acumen, and in the weaker and more imperfect manner it acts in the production of a witty conceit, the more imperfect the jeſt. A poor, feeble, languid acumen, or

which

which acts in a poor, languid, effete manner, cannot poſſibly produce ſprightly jeſts. 2. The aptitude of a jeſt to cauſe laughter: herein conſiſts the end of a jeſt: and a means is ſo much the more perfect, the more adapted it is to reach its end. Conſequently, the more adapted is a jeſt, upon the whole, to excite laughter, and that in an irreſiſtible manner, the more perfect it is: but the leſs adapted to that purpoſe, the leſs perfect is it. 3. The proper expreſſion of a jeſt. The expreſſion conſtitutes an important part therein. The ſprightlieſt jeſt may entirely miſcarry by an awkward and coarſe expreſſion. Conſequently, a perſon will be ſo much the happier at jeſting, the more capable he is to expreſs a jeſt in a proper manner and ſuitable to its nature.

30. I have at large ſhewn in my Æſthetic, that all the beauties of an ingenious ſaying may be reduced to ſeven ſpecies. Richneſs or variety, grandeur, truth, clearneſs, certainty, its ſtriking nature, and the well-adapted expreſſion; all which compriſe every thing requiſite to conſtitute a fine

fine ſaying. And thus we may lay down ſeven capital rules, comprehending all others, adapted for happy jeſts. 1. A jeſt muſt contain, or excite a proper variety of ideas. 2. A jeſt muſt be ſufficiently grand, or be an important, fruitful, decent thought. 3. Muſt be a juſt thought. 4. A lively, ſprightly thought. 5. Have a proper degree of certainty. 6. Muſt be ſufficiently ſtriking. 7. Be expreſſed in a fine manner. When a jeſt is conformable to all theſe rules, it muſt needs be produced by a great and perfect acumen, §. 22, 23. as will evidently appear from the fuller diſcuſſion of theſe rules hereafter, and muſt therefore be thought to be happily executed. At the ſame time it appears, that a jeſt which is conformable to all theſe rules, is a very fine, ſenſitive repreſentation, deviſable by none but a perſon endowed with eminent cognoſcitive faculties; and that thus, whoever can jeſt happily, both merits real regard and claims our juſt wonder. And from theſe enquiries it is evident, that the beauty of a jeſt, and the fire and ſprightlineſs

lineſs thereof ariſe from a twofold ground or principle. 1. From the multiplicity of the rules, to which it is conformable. The more rules of perfection a jeſt is conformable to, the finer and ſprightlier it is: but the fewer it is conformable to, the leſs beautiful it is. 2. From the more accurate obſervation of each ſeveral rule. The better each rule is obſerved, the finer, or more beautiful is the jeſt: but the more ſlightly and leſs carefully the rules are obſerved, the leſs beautiful is the jeſt.

31. We cannot poſſibly require that all jeſts ſhould be equally fine and ſprightly; and as little, that each happy jeſt ſhould be ſprightly in a ſupreme degree. Can we reaſonably require of a Poet, that all his poetical thoughts ſhall be equally fine, or beautiful in the higheſt degree? Neither can we juſtly be ſo ſevere in our demands on a jocular perſon. Now here a grand difficulty offers, in paſſing a judgment on ſingle jeſts. We have as yet made but little progreſs in determining the meaſures or degrees of incorporeal things: ſo that it cannot be re-

quired, a Critick ſhould, in the moſt accurate and diſtinct manner poſſible, determine the degree of beauty in a jeſt. Sufficient it is, if a jeſt cannot be altogether cenſured, when happening to labour under any one imperfection; nor altogether approved, on account of ſome few perfections: ſo that we can but nearly determine, that a jeſt has a ſufficiently eminent degree of beauty. And then it is carefully to be obſerved, that a quite different judgment muſt be paſſed on jeſts in a Poem, to what is to be paſſed on thoſe in other diſcourſes, and in common converſation. A poetical jeſt muſt be more elegant than a jeſt in any other regular diſcourſe; and this laſt, than a jeſt in common converſation. A Poet is altogether cenſurable, when his thoughts are but fine in a degree of mediocrity.

——— *mediocribus eſſe Poetis*
Non homines, non Dî, non conceſſere columnæ. HORAT.

Conſequently, we may juſtly require, that a poetical jeſt, or a jeſt in a Poem, be above

above mediocrity. In any other regular diſcourſe, a jeſt may intervene, not quite ſo fine, but which in the mouth of a Poet would be deſpicable. In common converſation we muſt not be ſo ſtrict and ſevere: there, a jeſt may paſs as ſufficiently fine, though ridiculous, if introduced into a regular diſcourſe. I mean not, that it is no ways allowable to propoſe in common converſation ſuch as are eminently fine: I only mean to remark, we are not to be ſo ſevere on jeſts in common converſation and friendly intercourſe, as on thoſe in a regular proſaic diſcourſe; nor on theſe laſt, as on jeſts in poems. And therefore it would be contrary to my intention in this work, to require jeſts in common diſcourſe to be perfectly conformable to the rules I am to lay down.

CHAP. II.

THE FIRST BEAUTY OF A JEST IS VARIETY.

32. THE firſt beauty of happy jeſt ariſes from the conſideration of the firſt rule of perfection, §. 30, which conſiſts in the variety and richneſs of the thoughts, exiſting in a due proportion in a jeſt. A perſon diſplays a great perfection and ſtrength of wit, when inexhauſtible in jeſting, capable to jeſt often, and on all proper occaſions, in a fine manner. A perſon, whoſe readineſs at jeſting extends over innumerable objects, has a wide field before him, where his acumen diſplays its activity; and therefore he muſt be allowed to have a very rich fund of conceits. But herein conſiſts not the perfection, I am to ſpeak of: the perfection I mean, muſt center in a ſingle jeſt. A jeſt, to be adorned with this perfection, muſt exhibit a great deal at once,

once, open a ſcene richly ornamented, but exhibit the entire ſcene at one view. If the jeſter ſhould retail this ſtore of thoughts, and expoſe it to view in parcels, the jeſt would turn to a tedious long-winded diſcourſe, and thus ceaſe to be one. A jeſt muſt be conciſe, §. 24, 25. conſequently exhibit a great variety in one thought at one and the ſame time: to produce which, a great degree of wit and an extraordinary acumen are required, capable of exhibiting multiplicity and variety, in an ingenious, acute manner, §. 22, 23.

33. A jeſt, from the perfection pointed out in the foregoing paragraph, acquires a beauty uncommonly agreeable, and capable of producing an eminent degree of delight: nothing yields a higher pleaſure than the diverſity we find in an agreeable object. When employing our attention on a thing that contains very little in it, we thereby ſoon exhauſt it; and thus finding little food for our curioſity, cannot ſufficiently ſatisfy it. We feel juſt the ſame uneaſineſs as a thirſty perſon in lack of

ſufficient water to drink. On the contrary, the eye roves with extatic delight over an extenſive unbounded landſkip, filled with an infinite variety of different objects. Every thing grand and infinite, and which contains a great variety, excites an agreeable ſenſation in the ſoul. Whether, in contemplating theſe things ſhe exults at her own vigour and ſtrength, which enables her to ſurvey ſo many things at once: or, at the liberty, her ever-craving curioſity has, of proceeding from one particular to another in ſuch an object, to full ſatiety: or, at each repreſentation being itſelf a perfection, which the ſoul feels with delight, and ſo much the more, the more objects ſhe repreſents to herſelf at once: or, that by the multiplicity of repreſentations, produced by the rich variety of the object, and centering at once in the ſoul, a harmony or coincidence between the various things ariſes, which ſhe feels, and from which, as from a ſenſation of perfection, a pleaſure muſt enſue. Be this as it will, experience ſhews, that change and variety cauſe delight.

light. Nay, we may carry the matter higher, and affirm, that nothing can be agreeable, if deſtitute of variety and multiplicity. When thus a jeſt comprizes ſuch a variety, it muſt needs be agreeable: which could not be, were variety no perfection. And can we refuſe adding pleaſure and delight to the beauties of a jeſt? Such a jeſt produces laughter, by the pleaſing agitations of which, the mind gains agreeable ſenſations, is cleared and brightened. It is therefore evident, that a jeſt, to be happily executed, muſt contain a due variety of thoughts. On the contrary, a poor jeſt affords little reflection, as exhibiting little variety at once. A perſon of condition married a very mean woman: another ſaid; "This gentleman has brought a ſpot of "oil on his family." This jeſt affords much matter of reflection. The whole family is compared to a garment: a ſpot of oil coming on it, ſpreads farther and farther; but the more it ſpreads, the leſs it ſtains the parts of the cloth, into which it ſoaks. Juſt ſo in unequal marriages: their imme-

diate children ſuffer moſt in their honour, but in the great grand-children the ſtain in the noble blood gradually wears off. We have inſtances enough of poor jeſts, of which none can be ignorant.

34. A jeſt may be various ways ſo framed, as to exhibit a great deal at once: either when exhibiting at one time many objects compared together; or, when compared, they differ much from each other; or, when exhibiting many coincidences of the things compared; or, when diſcloſing a variety of ridicule. We will conſider diſtinctly all theſe particulars. Firſt, a jeſt yields much matter of thought, when we compare many objects at once, and are thereby obliged to think of them all at one time. It is, indeed, not neceſſary, in every jeſt to compare many things together; a jeſt may be very luckily formed, though but two things be thus compared: and in that caſe, the richneſs and variety of a jeſt are obtained by other means. The beauty of a thought may be cauſed various ways; and it will be ſufficient, if I now ſhew, that

a jeſt

a jeſt acquires a degree of beauty, when in it many things are exhibited in an ingenious and acute manner. This I ſhall explain by three principal caſes.

35. Firſt, a ſufficient variety of objects, exhibited in an ingenious manner, is obtained in a jeſt, when made by the ſkilful application of a poetical quotation from a well-known Poet. If the choice of the verſe is happily made, the jeſt infallibly ſucceeds, if in other reſpects conformable to the rules of jeſting. And then we may either keep to the thoughts and words of the Poet, without alteration, or ſo vary them, as the end propoſed may require. Now whoever knows the Poet from whom the paſſage is taken, will, by the quotation, or a few words of it, have the connection of the whole brought to his mind. It is therefore evident, that in this caſe a multiplicity of various ideas is preſented at once to the mind. A perſon of wit ſaw a man riding, with his wife ſitting behind him on the horſe; and pointing to him, repeated thoſe words of Horace,

Poſt Equitem ſedet atra cura.

Gloomy

Gloomy care ſits behind the rider. Horace in this Ode deſcribes carking cares as always purſuing a man given up to their tyranny. Now as all this is brought to the mind, and compared with a wife, there is occaſion given to much reflection at one and the ſame time. Bayle in his writings has often jeſted in this manner, and many Satiriſts have availed themſelves of this very turn. Nay, if we deviſe an emblem or ſymbol, which is to contain a jeſt, the device or motto is uſually taken from ſome Poet. However, it is evident, that the perſons, to whom the jeſt is propoſed, muſt be well acquainted with the Poet: otherwiſe the jeſt will be obſcure, and thereby loſt.

36. Secondly, a jeſt may exhibit many ideas at once, when grounded on ſome known adage; or if a proverb is in a proper manner adduced on any occaſion. Many proverbial ſayings have, in virtue of their meaning, not only a reference to many things and particular caſes at the ſame time, but are alſo in common life adduced in numberleſs particular circumſtances. And

thus

thus as ſoon, as ſuch a proverb is heard, the imaginative faculty directly exhibits to itſelf many ſuch like caſes and circumſtances at once, in which it is uſually applied. In order therefore to jeſt, and to adduce for that purpoſe a well-known adage, which in other reſpects ſuits the caſe, and ſufficiently exhibits the ridicule in any thing, the jeſt acquires thereby a degree of richneſs and variety altogether agreeable. It is a common proverb, "That there is no diſputing "about taſte." A wretched Critick, who commended a very mean Poem, and employed this very proverb, by way of defence or apology, was expoſed by an emblematical repreſentation: viz. a fly, painted on a dung-hill in queſt of food, with the above proverbial ſaying ſet over it. It is alſo a well-known adage, "That but half of what "is publickly reported, is to be believed." The Dutcheſs of Aiguillon, a near relation of Cardinal Richelieu, complained much of the Lady of St. Chaumont, as being upbraided by her with having had ſix children by her couſin.

couſin. M. de Charoſt, who was preſent, replied, "Your Grace doubtleſs knows, "that but half of what is publickly report-"ed, is to be credited." And thus ſarcaſtically upbraided her with three children at leaſt by her couſin.

37. Thirdly, a jeſt may have the perfection, I am ſpeaking of, when grounded on an hiſtorical relation, which may either be deviſed on purpoſe, or borrowed from real hiſtory. In the firſt caſe, it muſt be ſo artfully contrived, as to exhibit in a very ſtriking manner the ridicule which is to form the jeſt. The writers of ſatire and comedy, and ſatirical fabuliſts, avail themſelves very often of this device, in order to form a jeſt. And in that caſe, the jeſt exhibits at once the whole of the deviſed occurrence; and thus on occaſion of the jeſt, we exhibit a great variety at once: in common converſation this knack is alſo made uſe of; and hence it is evident, why we are not entirely to depend on the narrations of perſons of wit and humour, as they uſually adulterate relations, omitting

true

true circumſtances, and adding others, only for the jeſt's ſake. If the facts, on which the jeſt is grounded, are borrowed from a genuine hiſtory, it is not uſual to recount them at large; a principal character, thing, or circumſtance need only be adduced, to bring the whole ſtory to mind: or the whole of an occurrence may be repreſented to the mind by a ſhort ſentence. At Tholouſe lived an Advocate, called Adam, who always drew up for the Preſident of a College of Magiſtrates, the diſcourſes he was to pronounce on ſolemn occaſions. Adam happened to be on a journey, at a time the Preſident was to make an oration, which he framed himſelf as well as he could. As he was repeating it in publick, he was often at a ſtand, and at laſt ſtopped quite ſhort: upon which one of his collegues called out, "Adam where art thou?" Perhaps, we may blame this jeſt, becauſe the paſſage is taken from Scripture. But in other reſpects, theſe few words muſt neceſſarily bring to mind the whole occurrence, as it ſtands in the Bible, when Adam, after

after the fall, hid himself. And so the fact, on which the jest is founded, must be well-known, in order to be understood.

38. In the second place, a jest yields matter of much reflection, when the objects compared therein, after an ingenious manner, differ from each other in degrees of variety and multiplicity, § 34. If things, so combined, differ not in a considerable, but only in a very low, degree from each other, the discovery of their coincidence yields either none at all, or at most a very frigid jest. An indication this of a feebleness of wit; as its perfection requires an ability to discover coincidences between objects the most different, §. 22. The acumen must at the same time be in exercise; consequently a great diversity exhibited at once: and therefore the objects, thus displayed in a jest, must differ considerably. Other reasons, besides, may be adduced for this rule: a jest is to exhibit something ridiculous, which, as I shall presently shew consists in a contradiction between little things. Every jest therefore must, in order to excite

cite laughter, exhibit ſuch a contradiction. Now this cannot eaſily happen, on comparing things which differ ſcarcely at all, or but very little. But if we take things evidently differing, and that in a conſiderable degree, and in which no coincidence is ſurmiſed, the diſcovery of a coincidence appears ſomething contradictory. And if, notwithſtanding, we make this diſcovery of coincidence, it is thence the ridicule ariſes. We may moreover add, that if we did not obſerve this rule, the jeſt would not be ſufficiently new and unexpected. Things, that too remarkably agree or coincide, are very eaſily compared. The loweſt degree of attention may ſerve to diſcover their likeneſs and reſemblance; and which can conſequently afford nothing of novelty or ſurprize. A ſprightly jeſt requires, therefore, the comparing, in an ingenious manner, objects which greatly differ. Their difference muſt be ſo conſiderable, as that at firſt ſight they may ſeem to have nothing common: or, the coincidence we conſider in them, be at leaſt of ſuch a nature as to appear

pear to contradict their manifeſt difference. And in that caſe, the diſcovery of the ridicule is heightened. At firſt view, a ſpot of oil in a garment ſeems to have no manner of reſemblance with an unequal match.

39. A jeſt which is without the perfection mentioned in the preceding paragraph, proves ſo inſipid a conceit as can never be conſidered to be the production of the acumen. A ſprightly jeſt muſt not only be produced by a great degree of wit, but alſo diſplay a very great degree of acumen: which is no otherwiſe poſſible but by the diſcovery of a conſiderable difference, at the ſame time, with the coincidence of the objects compared, §. 20, 23. And thus a jeſt, not to be a conceit, muſt, in an ingenious manner, compare things greatly differing; muſt be ſo fine and acute as not readily to be diſcovered by a perſon unendowed by Nature with a peculiar degree of acumen and wit. But this can no otherwiſe be obtained, than by ordering the jeſt ſo, as that whoever will underſtand it, muſt be previouſly aware of a great difference: as

in

in that caſe a great degree of wit is required to diſcover coincidences. We might here adduce many inſtances in common life of ſuch inſipid jeſts, were there any hopes of amending or improving the taſte of the people. One inſtance may ſuffice: Baron Holberg has drawn his Bramarbas, as a fool, who imagines he can jeſt wittily, and relates in what manner he joked or bantered one, who teazed him; by telling him, "Sir, you are a fool in truth:" and this ſpeech Bramarbas takes for a banter. The perſon, thus jeered, was a fool, or he was not: if not, the whole of the thought is falſe, and cannot be called a jeſt. If a fool: a fool is compared with a fool; and can ſuch a compariſon deſerve to be called acute?

40. I have ſhewn, §. 38, that it is a beauty in a jeſt to compare, in an ingenious manner, objects very different. Now things unlike differ from each other, as their unlikeneſs conſiſts in their different qualities: conſequently, it is a beauty in a jeſt, when objects unlike, and of a quite

different and remote ſpecies, are, in an ingenious manner, compared together. It is very ingenious to compare thoſe which have a palpable unlikeneſs, ſo great and conſiderable as to require a great degree of attention, to diſcover their latent likeneſs, and ſuch as few perſons could imagine in them. There is no ſuch great ſkill requiſite to compare things of one and the ſame ſpecies, and to diſcover their evident and palpable agreements. Such a compariſon may, indeed, often prove a good allegory, a good ſimilitude, or other witty application; but a jeſt it can never be called; at leaſt it wants a great degree of beauty. As little as a painter who makes a picture reſemble the original as much as may be, will cauſe laughter; ſo little will a perſon be moved to laugh by the repreſentation of the evident likeneſs of two objects, greatly reſembling each other. Lewis XI. of France affords an inſtance of a jeſt, in which this beauty at leaſt is obſervable. Mention being made in his preſence, of an unlearned perſon, who had got a fine library of books;

books; the King ſaid, "He reſembles a "hump-backed perſon, who carries a "burden on his back, which he cannot "ſee." It is plain, that an unlearned owner of a fine library of books, and a hump-backed perſon, are two things of great and evident unlikeneſs. Or, take the following inſtance, A man of wit ſaid of one, who was a back-biter, and who never eat at home; but was always an obtruding gueſt at other people's tables. "This "man never opens his mouth but at other "people's expence." Here are two things very unlike, compared together; the opening the mouth to ſpeak, and the opening it to eat: alſo to do ſomething at the expence both of the good name, and of the purſes, of other people.

41. Juſt ſo it holds with the inequalities of objects, or the difference of their magnitudes. The more unequal things are, the more they differ in magnitude: and yet compared in an ingenious manner, a jeſt may thereby acquire a great degree of beauty, §. 38. Experience ſhews, that nothing is

more ridiculous and ſilly than to compare little things with great, or to put them on a footing. The ridiculous folly of vain and proud mortals conſiſts exactly in their wanting to expand themſelves, like the frog in the fable, which would fain be as big as an ox, puffing itſelf up to a degree of burſting aſunder. The compariſon of very unequal things, or of little and great together, is a very plentiful ſource of the ridiculous. Now as a jeſt is the repreſentation of the ridiculous; from this alſo we may conceive, why it is a beauty in a jeſt to compare, in an ingenious manner, very unequal things together: which may be done two ways. Firſt, by comparing great things with ſmall, to render the former ridiculous. And ſecondly, by comparing ſmall things with great, to make the ſmall ridiculous. In the firſt caſe great caution is neceſſary. To make great things ridiculous, is often a criminal wantonneſs. And to put great things on a footing with little, may often be the effect of ſtupidity, ignorance, clowniſhneſs and impudence. The clown, who aſked, "whether

"ther the King was as great a man as his" Lord, put a ridiculous queſtion; but it was the reſult of great ſtupidity. Nay, as great things become equal to ſmall, upon ſeparating from them that by which they exceed the ſmall in magnitude, the ridicule in making ſuch a compariſon, will oftentimes not hold. But on comparing ſmall things with great, in an ingenious manner, to make the ſmall ridiculous, and the great loſe nothing of their worth and prerogative, neither ſtupidity nor wantonneſs is betrayed; and the abſurdity is ſo obſervable therein, as neceſſarily to fall into the ridiculous. Auſonius afford us an example, Epigram 95, where he relates the adventures of Fauſtulus, riding on an ant, which flung the unhappy *Fauſtulus*, and gave him ſo violent a kick, as to kill him, and in the pangs of death he was able only to ſay by way of conſolation, that his fall was as great as Phaeton's;

Fauſtulus inſidens formicæ, ut magno elephanto,
Decidit, & terræ terga ſupina dedit.

Moxque idem eſt ad mortem multatus calcibus ejus,
Perditus ut poſſet vix retinere animam.
Vix tamen eſt fatus: quid rides improbe livor?
Quod cecidi? ceeidit non aliter Phaeton.

Which infinitely exceeds that of Fauſtulus: and therefore it is evident, that the ridiculous in the words of the latter ariſes from the vaſt diſproportion between both caſes.

42. No objects, to ſpeak comparatively, ſo greatly differ, as things oppoſite and contradictory to each other. Things, thus oppoſite, have ſo far nothing common. It is therefore evident from what I before obſerved, that, if in a jeſt, oppoſite and contradictory objects are, in an ingenious manner, mutually combined and compared, it acquires great beauty. This compariſon of mutually oppoſite things proves a rich ſource of the ridiculous. And therefore ſuch jeſts are generally to be met with in ſatirical ironical writings. The Duke of Oſſuna, on a great feſtival, went on board the King of Spain's Galley's, in order to releaſe, in virtue of the

the privilege he enjoyed, one galley-ſlave. After having aſked many of them the reaſons of their condemnation, and what they had been guilty of? They all wanted to juſtify themſelves, and to perſuade the Duke, that they ſuffered unjuſtly, except one only, who very frankly owned all his faults. "Turn "out this Villain," ſays the Duke in releaſing him, "from among theſe honeſt fel-"lows, leſt he ſhould debauch them." The whole of this jeſt is founded on an irony, and on the combination of things contradictory.

43. From what we have hitherto diſcuſſed, there flows a remark, which reſpects jeſts in general, and which may alſo be proved from other principles beſides: namely, that a man of great wit, and little acumen, or penetration, can never ſucceed in jeſting. Such a man proves always intolerable, with his facetious conceits, to judicious perſons. His jeſts are mere playing on words, or puns, or allegorical, metaphorical and tropical modes of ſpeech, and the like ſports of wit, without applying them with any acumen or

penetration: and in that caſe he muſt fall into the inſipid. Without acumen, a man cannot poſſibly guard againſt falſe thoughts: and if in jeſting he thinks without acumen, he overlooks the differences of objects, and in that caſe may eaſily, by a falſe conceit, repreſent to himſelf a coincidence in things, which greatly differ. Now as I have hitherto ſhewn, that the objects, to be mutually compared in a jeſt, muſt be very different; but this rule not being poſſible to be obſerved without a degree of acumen, as being that very faculty, by which we diſcover the differences of things; ſo it is evident, that each witty conceit is not to be deemed a jeſt; but we are, moreover, to enquire, whether the wit, in the production thereof, was duly ſupported by the acumen or penetration. And hence alſo I have defined a jeſt, a thought produced both by the wit and acumen combined. And we may always obſerve, that perſons of no great underſtanding are alſo devoid of the neceſſary acumen; ſuch as very young perſons, and people advanced, indeed, in years, but children

children in underſtanding; theſe may have a great deal of wit, and for that reaſon an uncommon turn for drollery; but yet be incapable to jeſt happily, only becauſe they are without acumen. It is evident from other principles, that a perſon devoid of acumen, cannot poſſibly have a good taſte: and thus alſo for the ſame reaſon want of acumen cauſes the want of the gift to jeſt.

44. The third means, whereby a jeſt may gain a due variety of thoughts, (that beauty I have been hitherto treating on,) conſiſts in repreſenting, in an ingenious manner, ſeveral coincidences of the things compared. On repreſenting in a jeſt many objects, §. 34,--37, differing very much from each other, §. 38,--43, and yet to be capable of diſcovering quickly, and exhibiting briefly many and various coincidences; ſuch a repreſentation is the fruit of a very compleat wit, §. 22, and muſt therefore be beautiful or fine. And even by this means there ariſe in the jeſt itſelf an alternate variety, a multiplicity of ideas, which not only yield delight, but alſo expoſe the ridiculous in a

variety

variety of lights. When things, being in an ingenious manner, mutually compared, are, in conſequence of the foregoing rules, greatly different, and yet their manifold coincidences diſcovered, this diſcovery being unexpected, cauſes an agreeable aſtoniſhment and ſurprize. We admire every thing that is new to us, or what we had no idea of before. It appears at firſt ſight abſurd, that objects, differing greatly and palpably, ſhould yet mutually coincide or agree in many particulars; and hence, by the diſcovery of ſuch a variety of coincidences, we are agreeably ſurpriſed. And if in other reſpects the whole of the repreſentation duly exhibits the ridiculous, we may then ſay, that by this beauty of a jeſt, the ridiculous is placed in a variety of lights; and thus ſuch a jeſt will raiſe laughter in a very cogent and agreeable manner. The Count of Villa Mediana took it highly amiſs, that Philip IV. ſhould aſſume the ſurname of Great, and that at a time when he was ſtript of a part of his dominions: He ſaid, "this ap-
"pellation was no otherwiſe applicable to
"him

"him than to pits, which are ſo much the "greater, the more there is taken out of "them." This facetious conceit is in this particular beautiful, that between two very different objects, a King and a Pit, a variety of coincidences is diſcovered. It may be ſaid, perhaps ſomething falſe lies concealed in this conceit; but I have once already hinted, that a jeſt may in one reſpect be juſt, tho' in others not without ſome defects. One coincidence the Count himſelf has pointed out: But there remains concealed a reſemblance, namely that ſuch a King, the greater he is, of ſo much the leſs is he maſter: and thereby his imaginary greatneſs is exhibited in a light ridiculous enough.

45. When I ſay, that it is a beauty in a jeſt, to exhibit, in an ingenious manner, many and various coincidences: I want by no means to maintain, that the jeſt is to be a long-winded recital of theſe coincidences; as if its beauty conſiſted in an enumeration of them one after another: Nothing leſs; the jeſt would thereby become frigid, and tranſformed into an allegory at large. A great deal

deal may be ſaid in little, and in a well-choſen thought much exhibited at once. When a man propoſes a jeſt, he is only to open the ſcene to his hearers, and afford them a proſpect into a wide field. They are of themſelves, by the direction of the jocoſe conceit, to hit on the particular coincidences, and be thereby, as it were, forced to apply their attention to the diſcovery of the variety of coincidences. The jeſt is to exhibit to the hearer at once, and in an inſtant, a great vanity and multiplicity of coincidences of the objects mutually compared; is to be ſhort ſummary of the particulars compared; and to reſemble, if I may uſe the expreſſion, an abyſs, in which we ever diſcover more matter of wonder, the longer we view it. It is ſelf-evident, that the particulars compared ſhould to be true or juſt. A juggle of the wit, whereby a difference is exhibited to us under the notion of a coincidence, or by which we repreſent to ourſelves things mutually different, as one and the ſame, may cauſe an ill-grounded pleaſure only ſo long as we are deceived by the miſtake.

take. As ſoon as the miſt is diſſipated, and the juggle removed, we bluſh that we ſuffered ourſelves to be moved to laughter by a conceit which proves to be a falſe and groundleſs thought. But of this more fully, when I come to ſpeak of the truth of a jeſt.

46. By the multiplicity and variety of the coincidences of the different objects which a jeſt diſplays, it, moreover, gains another beauty; which by any other means it poſſibly cannot. A jeſt, adorned with this perfection, yields a pleaſure, as often as we recollect it: at leaſt, its fire or ſprightlineſs is not conſiderably damped, ſhould our recollection of it be ever ſo often repeated. It is not readily to be imagined, that the hearer ſhould exhauſt ſuch a jeſt at once. On repeated reflection he will often diſcover ſome coincidences he before overlooked: whereby not only a new pleaſure will ariſe, but we have alſo a ſuperadded joy, on our being more and more convinced, that a jeſt has pleaſed us by its own intrinſic worth, and that our laughter was cauſed by a conceit, which richly claimed it.

We

We rejoice at our own good taſte, when aſſured, that our mirth betrayed neither a flaſhy levity nor a vitiated taſte; which is apt to burſt out into violent fits of laughter at an inſipid conceit. To a jeſt, endowed with this beauty, we may juſtly apply the following verſes of Ovid.

Cunque nihil, toties lecta, e dulcedine perdant,
Viribus illa ſuis, non novitate placent.

"Such jeſts pleaſe by their own native force and vigor, and not by their novelty, be they ever ſo often repeated." A jeſt, which contains very little in it, may, indeed, for other reaſons, juſtly pleaſe: but as it is very ſoon exhauſted, its charm is ſoon over, on a repeated recollection. True it is, as I ſhall ſhew in what follows, that novelty is a peculiar charm in a jeſt, and that a peculiar pleaſure flows from it. But novelty is not the only beauty in a jeſt. I have been hitherto ſpeaking of a quite different beauty, which ariſes not from novelty, and which ſubſiſts in a jeſt, tho' no longer quite new.

47. The

47. The coincidences of different objects are either reſemblances, or equalities, or both theſe together. Now as a jeſt is fine, when, in an ingenious manner, exhibiting various coincidences of different objects, §. 44. ſo it has a great degree of beauty when diſplaying various reſemblances, equalities and proportions of things mutually different. It is true, the bare diſcovery of reſemblances may often prove a witty conceit; but it is eaſily ſhewn, that the diſcovery of equalities and proportions affords a ſtill greater beauty as to the jeſt, or, that a jeſt is more beautiful, when different things are mutually compared, not only as to their qualities, but alſo their quantities, than when compared only with reſpect to the former. For by this twofold compariſon we exhibit in a jeſt a greater multiplicity and variety of particulars compared, and this always conſtitutes a beauty, §. 44. Reſemblances ſtrike the eye more, may be more eaſily diſcovered than equalities, and the diſcovery of the former requires leſs acumen or penetration than that of the latter. In order

der to diſcover equalities and proportions, the quantities are to be meaſured, and then mutually compared. Now if this can be done with the greateſt diſpatch, and, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye, a perſon thereby diſcovers a good eye and a great degree of acumen. The diſcovery of bare reſemblances often cauſes very prepoſterous and inſipid compariſons, and which are therefore ridiculous, on account of their abſconding. All ſingle features of a face may be beautiful, but if a due equality and proportion are wanting, the face conſidered together, or in the whole, will be far from being beautiful. And thus we may affirm, that the proportion and compariſon of quantities in their ſeveral parts is the ground-plan work of the beauty of the whole. And can any thing be properly beautiful, when its ground-work is bad? A jeſt therefore acquires a great degree of beauty, and is the reſult of a penetrating and acute wit, when therein different objects mutually compared, not only as to their quality, but alſo their quantity. I do not inſiſt that we are in this

caſe

caſe to meaſure every thing in the moſt accurate manner. A jeſt in a general ſenſe is but a ſenſitive and confuſed repreſentation: it is ſufficient therefore, if only the equalities and proportions be diſcovered by a good eye. A Gentleman with a very long noſe happened to be in the preſence-chamber of the King of France, where a Duke with a ſnub-noſe was alſo preſent, who began to jeer the former on the length of his noſe. The Gentleman, to avoid his banters, moved to another part of the chamber, whither the Duke followed, ſtill repeating his attacks, which ſet the whole company a-laughing. The Gentleman was at a loſs, whither to retire next. At length he got behind the King's chair, in hopes of being ſecure there. But as the Duke teazed him there too, ever and anon repeating, "What a d—n'd noſe he has got," the Gentleman at length being out of all patience, ſaid, "Certainly my noſe was "made at the expence of yours." Here we have exhibited not only a reſemblance between the Duke's conduct, and that of a dunning creditor, but alſo both noſes are

compared together as to bigneſs, and thereby ſomething ridiculous diſcovered in the Duke's behaviour.

48. From ſome obſervations already made, it appears, that a jeſt acquires a degree of beauty, when conſiſting in a figurative, metaphorical, and allegorical thought. In one ſingle well-choſen metaphorical and allegorical repreſentation, a variety of objects, together with their various coincidences, may be exhibited at once. A jeſt therefore may by a ſingle well-choſen metaphor, a ſhort ſimilitude, obtain that degree of beauty of which I have hitherto been treating. A learned perſon, having a book read to him in which the Author had ſtolen a thought from him, ſaid: "See here, one of my chil-"dren has made its fortune." This compariſon of a thought with a child, &c. is a metaphorical repreſentation.

49. The whole of the variety of objects, and the multiplicity and variety of their differences and coincidences, which, in conſequence of what we have hitherto been diſcuſſing, are to be repreſented in a jeſt, cannot

not fail to diſcloſe a variety of ridicule. On the contrary, the richneſs of a jeſt contributes nothing to the jocular; for this laſt depends on the ridiculous. And thus a jeſt is ſo much the more beautiful, the more ridicule it diſcovers, and the more varied that ridicule: and in that caſe excites ſo much the more effectually to laughter. If a ſingle ridiculous object ſtirs up to laughter, how much more ſo, upon exhibiting a variety of ridicule at once?

CHAP. III.

THE SECOND BEAUTY OF A JEST IS IMPORTANCE.

50. WHOEVER has attained to a juſt taſte in works of wit, cannot but know, that in general there is a threefold ſpecies or diſtinction of ideas uſually made; the ſimple, the mean and the ſublime; and that theſe three ſpecies, taken together, are uſually denominated the greatneſs of the

thoughts. The greatneſs, importance, or propriety of a jeſt, require two things. Firſt, that the contents of it, the object, and every thing repreſented therein, whether a perſon, a thing, or whatſoever it may be, ſhall be thought worthy of an ingenious facetious turn. The object of a jeſt muſt neither be too important, nor too low and mean. And ſecondly, the whole of the ingenious conceit is to be ſuitable to the object, adapted to the matter, and to all the circumſtances of time, place, audience and jeſter.

51. I proceed to ſhew, that the genuine ridiculous conſiſts in the abſurdity to be met with in little minute things, and that it is an unreaſonable conduct to make great and important matters the ſubject of laughter. Now as a jeſt is the ingenious repreſentation of the ridiculous, in order to cauſe laughter §. 24, we are never to jeſt on great and important matters of the middling and ſublime ſpecies. And thus in every happy jeſt we are to avoid two faults. 1. Never to jeſt, if with reſpect to the matter and circumſtances, the jeſt ſhould

prove

prove low or mean. There are certain things, on which we are always to think with due ſeriouſneſs. Now to jeſt in ſuch caſes, betrays a great degree of levity, a flaſhy and childiſh turn of mind, and a lowneſs of taſte and underſtanding; as we thereby ſhew, that we conſider matters of importance in an inconſiderable light. Here I could enumerate a great many faults, committed in jeſting. Every reaſonable perſon will admit, that it is unſeemly to jeſt on religion, on the ſciences, on virtue, on groſs vices, &c. Who can approve a Preacher, jeſting in the pulpit? In general, to this claſs belong all ſuch as jeſt like great mens fools, who never take the trouble to enquire into the propriety of circumſtances. It is true, an unſeemly and inconſiderate jeſt may in other reſpects be perfectly ſprightly; but its other perfections will never make this imperfection a beauty. For inſtance: We have many examples, of perſons jeſting at their death, There was a law ſubſiſting formerly in France, that a delinquent under certain circumſtances ſhould be pardoned, if he

married a common proſtitute. A native of Picardy who was to be executed for ſome capital crime, having aſcended the ladder, a proſtitute, who was lame, was preſented to him; and it was in his option to marry her, or to be hanged. After ſurveying her for a moment, he called out to the Executioner, "Tuck up, tuck up! ſhe limps." This jeſt, indeed, is uncommonly ſprightly, as exhibiting a deformed creature to be a greater evil than hanging. But yet the laſt moments of our life are a period too important and ſolemn to admit of jeſting and mirth. 2. We are never to jeſt, when the objects and their circumſtances are much too low and inconſiderable, to be worth exhibiting in an ingenious manner their ridicule. Such jeſts are inſipid and ſilly, and it is often throwing away and waſting an ingenious conceit to no manner of purpoſe. Many witty and facetious perſons are ſubject to this failing. There is, for inſtance, a certain polite behaviour, which does not ſuit the lower order of people. Now ſuppoſe a perſon of common rank in a polite company guilty

of

of behaving a little uncourtly; perſons of a facetious turn perhaps will take occaſion thence to expoſe ſuch a one by jocular conceits. But whoever rightly conſiders the matter, will eaſily ſee, that ſuch conceits are thrown away, and not worth the while. And thus whoever would jeſt in a happy manner, muſt reſtrain himſelf, till he reflects, whether his effort of wit perfectly ſuits the object and all the circumſtances.

52. In order to form a right judgment of the importance and greatneſs of a jeſt, we may conſider it either in reſpect to virtue, or as it may contain ſomething of conſequence, without any regard to virtue. And as we uſually denominate things important, great, and uſeful, when procuring a conſiderable utility and advantage; ſo to conſtitute the importance of a ſprightly jeſt, will neceſſarily be required, 1. Its procuring at leaſt an innocent pleaſure, no ways unbecoming or diſgraceful in a reaſonable being. Is it needful to ſhew at large, that this is a ſufficiently important benefit of a jeſt? People, who are always ſerious to exceſs, ſpoil their temper,

and hurt their health; and we are under no ſmall obligations to a perſon of a facetious turn, when he procures us a neceſſary relaxation of mind. And even ſhould a jeſt contribute nothing to the moral improvement of a man, yet it may be of ſufficient importance, if only cauſing an innocent ſatisfaction. All jeſts therefore, which produce an unſeemly, vulgar, low, diſhoneſt and vicious pleaſure; ſuch as, for inſtance, obſcenity and ribaldry, are without a requiſite ſhare of greatneſs and importance. 2. A jeſt is ſtill more important, when it tends to a moral utility, and can make a man better. There are ſeveral peccadillo's and follies; for inſtance, affectation, ridiculous behaviour, &c. too unimportant to require a ſolemn ſerious reprimand. By a jeſt, folly may be eaſieſt and beſt expoſed; and by throwing ridicule on foibles or little failings, they may be corrected, as no reaſonable perſon readily chooſes to be made ridiculous. The fineſt jeſts therefore, are ſuch as contribute ſomething to moral improvement; and conſequently, ſatyrical

jeſts

jeſts, when otherwiſe ſprightly, are the beſt. Jeſts therefore, which promote vice and folly, obſtruct virtue, recommend error, and preclude truth, are in theſe reſpects unhappy jeſts. A wretched ſelf-conceited Painter ſaid, that he wanted to have his houſe white-waſhed, after which he would paint it. Another anſwered: "If you will be adviſed by me, firſt "paint, and then white-waſh your houſe." This jeſt, beſides other requiſites is fine, becauſe calculated to effect a moral utility; namely to bring this bungler to the due knowledge of himſelf.

53. As a jeſt ſhould in an ingenious manner exhibit the coincidence of different objects, it is ſo much the finer, the more important and greater the particular coincidences, diſcloſed thereby, are. A ſprightly jeſt therefore ingeniouſly diſplays reſemblances and equalities which depend on the internal qualities of the objects compared, on their coincident nature and properties: For, theſe are the moſt important particulars, in which different things may reſemble and be mutually

tually equal. But if the whole of a jocular conceit reſts barely on accidental and mutable qualities, or only on relations and circumſtances of time, place, &c. it proves either quite frigid, or has at moſt but a very low degree of beauty. As a perſon came from Church on a Sunday, he was met by one of his acquaintance, who would needs ſet up for a Freethinker, and who aſked: "What "the man in the tub had been prating "on?" Every judicious perſon ſees, how inſipid this conceit is. Suppoſing the figure of our pulpits is ridiculous, what is that to the Preacher? Will he therefore become ridiculous, becauſe the place he preaches in, is made ſo? And thus in order to jeſt properly, the conceit muſt be grounded either not at all, or not barely on relations and mutable qualities; but always on ſomething ridiculous diſcovered in its internal and eſſential qualities.

54. Here I have the faireſt opportunity imaginable to exhibit ſome ſorts of jeſts, as wretched and frigid conceits, tho' much in vogue, with many witlings who are capable of jeſting

jeſting in no other manner. I mean ſuch jeſts as depend on a bare playing on words. The names, by which objects are diſtinguiſhed, and words in general, are no internal determinations and qualities of the things indicated by them: They are but arbitrary ſigns, and a word might be made to denote a quite different thing from what it actually does, had the firſt inventors ſo pleaſed. Conſequently, when two different objects have one and the ſame name, they are therefore neither mutually alike nor equal, in regard to their nature and internal qualities; but have only an infinitely little and immaterial coincidence: conſequently, all jeſts depending on the bare coincidence of words and names, are extemely poor and frigid. The names of objects are much too remote from the ſurface of the objects themſelves, to be able to conſtitute even the laſt degree of coincidence appropriated to ſuch objects. A perſon of a facetious turn, in queſt of jeſts in the reſemblances of words, betrays a very low degree of wit, a wit much too feeble, to dive into the things themſelves. The objects

themſelves ſtand more remote from his point of view than their names, and he is too ſhort-ſighted to comprehend them. Such jeſts are therefore inſipid conceits, by no means to be approved: and can only pleaſe perſons of a ſhallow and infantile taſte. Some learned perſons happened to be diſputing on a certain point. One of themſaid, "I will prove my opinion, and then ſhut up." Unluckily a fool happened to be preſent, who underſtood not a word of the whole converſation, and for want of thought, was employed in blowing Tobacco-ſmoke circularly out of his mouth. He ſcarce heard the word ſhut-up, but he ſaid: "Pray Sir on no account do ſo, the Jaylor ſhuts-up." To multiply inſtances of ſuch wretched ſtuff would be ridiculous. Cicero in his ſecond book de Oratore, in general approves ſuch jeſts. Quintilian does not entirely reject them, but prefers others, not founded on a bare playing on words. I imagine, I have ſufficiently ſhewn, why ſuch jeſts are entirely to be diſapproved.

55. I by no means reject all puns or playing on words in a jeſt; nor do I account it

any

any fault to adduce coincidences of names, at the ſame time with other coincidences. I only hold, that a jeſt is compleatly poor, when the things compared together, have nothing beſides in common, but the arbitrary name. And we may hence eaſily perceive, whether a jeſt has this defect or no. We need only expreſs it in other words, or tranſlate it into another language. If in that caſe it loſes all its beauty, and ceaſes to be an ingenious conceit, it is certainly an inſipid pun or a playing on words. A ſprightly jeſt muſt remain a jeſt in all languages, tho' not in an equal degree of perfection; and perhaps it may be expreſſed in one language in a more ingenious manner than in another. We may affirm, that a ſprightly jeſt ſhould have the beauty of a poem. A poem muſt continue to be a poem, ſhould even the arrangement of the words be altered, and inſtead of thoſe employed, other equivalent words be put, and even ſhould it be tranſlated into another language;

Invenias etiam diſjecti membra Poetæ.

HORAT.

Conſe-

Conſequently, the facetious conceit is to reſt either ſolely or principally on the coincidence of the ideas and objects. But as the words, by which ſimilar and coincident objects and ideas are expreſſed, may in an unconſtrained manner, and not far-fetched, be mutually ſimilar, it would be putting oneſelf to an unneceſſary conſtraint in jeſting, purpoſely to avoid the coincidence of words, When not made the principal thing in a jeſt; and when conſidered as an unconſtrained conſequence of comparing things and ideas together, it may help to heighten the beauty of a jeſt, as denoting much more diſtinctly and accurately their coincidence, and thus facilitating and promoting our underſtanding the jeſt. If we allow this to have been the meaning of Cicero and Quintilian, we may juſtify their approbation of puns or playing on words. One having a brother, who paſſed for a hypocrite, ſaid, "My brother, indeed, is viſibly religious:" "True, anſwered one, he prays viſibly." Here is a playing on words, but not barely ſo; and it would be ridiculous to blame this jeſt on that account.

56. To

56. To this childiſh playing on words, we may add all ludicrous conceits, barely ariſing from an equivocal meaning, a playing on the name of a perſon or thing, a tranſpoſition of the letters of a name, a curtailing and lengthening names, or whatever other appellation this inſipid way of jeſting may go by. Cicero is very fond of this egregious trifling. His letters abound therewith; and in his oration againſt Verres, the Jus Verrinum is a well-known wretched conceit, ariſing from the equivocal meaning of the word Jus.

57. And thus all ludicrous conceits, depending on a bare playing on words, are inſipid. But this is only to be underſtood, when the perſon, who propoſes ſuch conceits, deems them witty, and gives them out as ſuch. Otherwiſe there are caſes, in which ſuch ludicrous conceits are beautiful, not conſidered in themſelves, but on account of certain circumſtances: as when a perſon is obliged to anſwer a fool in his own manner. Satire may oftentimes expreſs the language of a fool, to make him the more ridiculous.

The

The ſilly conceit, mentioned §. 54, of the perſon, who ſaid, the Jailor ſhuts up, was anſwered by one in the company: "True, but "he ſhuts up circularly". Than which nothing could be more inſipid. But what other anſwer could be given a fool? And the perſon, who gave it, did not conſider this conceit, as witty, only wanted to ſhew the witling, that his own conceit was low. Comedy alſo in giving characters of witlings, and expoſing them to ridicule, may do it in an ingenious artful manner, by a playing on words.

58. Nothing vicious and criminal can be called truely great. True greatneſs always conſiſts in a perfection, and an action, ſo far as it is criminal, can never be a perfection. A jeſt therefore, which ſhould be a thought truly great, muſt needs contain nothing criminal, and thus the greatneſs of a jeſt requires it ſhould be innocent, §. 50, 26. It muſt, conſequently, either promote virtue, tho' even in a remote manner, or at leaſt not contradict any genuine principles of virtue. It may perhaps appear a thing im-

impoſſible to ſome that a jeſt ſhould promote virtue. But the poſſibility of this may be eaſily ſhewn. When, for inſtance, ſuch vices, as on account of their inſignificancy deſerve no ſerious reprimand from the pulpit, are by means of ſprightly jeſts expoſed to ridicule; is it not undeniable, that perſons, who ſtand much upon their honour, may thereby be wrought upon, in the moſt effectual manner, to forſake thoſe vices? By means of a lucky jeſt, the paſſion of a man, who is ready to break out into the moſt violent acts of hoſtility may be quelled; and is not virtue hereby promoted? Whoever therefore will not ſet up for an avowed patron of vice, will allow, that all impious jeſts, all malicious jeſts, and whatever appellation criminal jeſts may go by, are unhappy jeſts, (ſhould they in other reſpects be ever ſo fine,) as being deficient in the due degree of greatneſs. When a criminal jeſt is, beſides, frigid, it does no great harm, as no intelligent perſon is thereby affected: but if in other reſpects very ſprightly, ſo much the more dangerous is it, and

thus ſo much the more imperfect. Whoever, for inſtance, by inſipid jeſts expoſes religion to ridicule, is certainly no very dreadful enemy thereof: but whoever banters religion by ſprightly jeſts, is always a dangerous perſon. Here a wide field offers, were I to enumerate all the ſpecies of criminal jeſts: but I will only propoſe four peculiar rules, which men are too apt to tranſgreſs in jeſting.

59. Firſt, the importance and decorum of jeſting require, that whoever will jeſt happily, muſt never make himſelf ridiculous and deſpicable by his jeſts. A man who practiſes virtue but in the ordinary degree, who lives but decently, muſt reſtrain himſelf within due bounds. But whoever is loſt to all ſhame, and makes nothing of ridiculing and deſpiſing others, is mean in the loweſt degree, and loſt to all ſentiments of true honour. Every thing, therefore, by which a man juſtly renders himſelf ridiculous and contemptible, is in direct contrariety to virtue. Conſequently, all ſuch jeſts, as expoſe a perſon to ridicule and contempt, not only

only every ſpecies of inſipid and frigid but alſo the ſprightly jeſts, are to be rejected. When a perſon exceeds in jeſting, is never eaſy but when doing ſo, and can never be ſerious for a moment, ſuch a man is conſidered, and that juſtly, as a buffoon, a fool, as the droll and fiddle of a company, as one incapable of acting or ſpeaking in a ſerious and reaſonable manner. Such a man, pleaſes us, indeed, by his ingenious ſtrokes of wit, at an hour when we want to be merry and to enjoy ourſelves; but weare ſometimes pleaſed with things, we have no very great value for. I leave every one to reflect, whether it is a character, becoming a reaſonable man, to be deemed a jack-pudding, or at moſt, a man we want only to paſs a merry hour with.

60. Secondly, a happy jeſt muſt never claſh with the rules of good breeding and decency. There are coarſe, ſlovenly, clowniſh, lewd ſayings, which are contrary to the firſt principles of common decency, and vulgarly called ſmutty. Be a jeſt therefore never ſo fine, if tainted with ſmut, it degene-

rates into low pleaſantry, and diſgraces the perſon ſo jeſting. I ſhould violate the rules of good breeding, were I to give inſtances. Such are but too common both among the low and the high vulgar. Many are incapable of jeſting in any other manner. Such jeſts may, indeed, tickle the fancy of lewd people, and raiſe a laugh: but it is evident, they are not the reſult of genius, but of the reverſe. We are therefore to reject all ſmutty and coarſe jeſts. Whoever cannot jeſt otherwiſe, ought to forbear. He does an injury to every well-bred company he happens to be in; both as he thereby cauſes them to be thought a ſet of low people; and alſo as indecency can never yield a pleaſure to perſons of ſenſe and taſte. A man, who knows how to live in the world, carefully avoids whatever is the common practice of the low vulgar: and this ſingle reaſon is ſufficient to condemn all ſmutty or indecent expreſſions, as they can only be the reſult of a depraved and low underſtanding.

61. We ſhall ſcarce find a writer of Satire and Comedy, that does not at times, at

leaſt

leaſt in appearance, write ſmuttily. Experience alſo teaches, that a ſet of merry people ſcarce ever meet together, but at laſt they fall into looſe or ſmutty diſcourſe; and I know not, whence it comes, that jeſts, in other reſpects fine, when daſhed with indelicacy, uſually excite our laughter moſt. And thus it might be queried, whether it is not allowable at times to introduce into jeſts, ſomething that claſhes with the rules of decency and good manners? This, indeed, is a tickliſh queſtion. Many things, only on account of prevailing cuſtoms, which are often very arbitrary, are deemed indecencies; and hence it is, that what is indecent at one time, is not ſo at another. Now in order to expoſe to ridicule, what we want at the ſame time to expoſe to contempt, it is not poſſible to do this in any other way, but by comparing it with contemptible things: Conſequently, ſomething may be often advanced in a jeſt, which may otherwiſe claſh with the generally eſtabliſhed rules of good breeding. Beſides, we ſhould take care, not to ſet up for Prudes, or affected-

ly nice perſons; ſuch being apt to deem many things indecent and ſmutty, which are far from being ſo. Yet in all this there is great precaution neceſſary, and a taſte improved not only by morality, but alſo by intercourſe with the polite word: otherwiſe it is impoſſible to be on our guard againſt indelicacy. To explain my meaning, I will give an inſtance. A certain perſon would not allow this world to be the beſt that was poſſible. He remained immoveable againſt every argument; either becauſe he would not, or could not underſtand them. He appealed to experience; in conſequence of which, he imagined he ſaw nothing but evil in the world. To which another replied: "You "are one, who ſees the world in its hind-"er parts only." It muſt be allowed, that we may innocently think and often ſpeak of this part of the body, without incroaching in the leaſt on good manners. Now the judgment paſſed by many on the beſt world, could not be placed in a more contemptible light, than it is by this jeſt. It may, for ought I know, be very innocent. I have, how-

however, but briefly touched on this head; and am fully perſuaded, that ſcarce one caſe in a hundred will be found, in which it is allowable to introduce the leaſt ſmuttineſs.

62. Thirdly, in order to jeſt happily, we are never to jeſt on or with things, which, on account of their importance and weight, claim our utmoſt ſerioufneſs. There are things, whether good or bad, virtues or vices, or of what nature ſoever they be, ſo great and important in themſelves, as never to be thought of and mentioned but with much ſedateneſs and ſolemnity. Laughter on ſuch occaſions is criminal and indecent: As, for inſtance, on a perſon being thunder-ſtruck, being remarkably vicious, or guilty of ſome enormous crime. To jeſt on ſuch occaſions betrays a childiſh levity, the fault of perſons who confound little things with great, and it always flows from the defect of a manly underſtanding and a ripe judgment. Now as a jeſt excites laughter, all jeſts on ſubjects too great to bear jeſting with, are indecent and unhap-

py. And here we have two ſorts of them. 1. Jeſts on great and important ſubjects, or an attempt to make ſuch ridiculous by jeſting, can never merit our approbation: There hangs a deformity about them, which a critic, abſtracted from all moral conſiderations, muſt condemn. For inſtance, all jeſts on religion, philoſophy, and the like important ſubjects: It is like throwing dirt out of mere wantonneſs on a decent perſon. Yet we are carefully to obſerve, that great things may accidentally have little abſurdities and blemiſhes often attending them, which admit of ridicule. In that caſe, not the objects, but the trifling follies, abſurdities, and blemiſhes, connected with them, are to be expoſed to ridicule. For inſtance, we are not allowed, to ridicule perſons of piety, Divines, Lawyers, Phyſicians, &c. as ſuch: But it is very proper to expoſe the exceſs of demureneſs in ſome pious perſons, the indecent behaviour of many Divines, and the pedantry of ſome learned men. 2. The making little things ridiculous by comparing them with greater,

greater, which ought to claim our moſt ſerious thoughts. It is true, that objects of conſequence remain in their full, original worth, and are not made ridiculous by ſuch jeſting; yet the imagination uſually bringing the jeſt again to our mind, when we come to reflect on ſuch important matters, we are conſtrained to laugh, and made to loſe our becoming ſerioufneſs. *Nimium riſus pretium eſt, ſi probitatis impendio conſtat.* "Laugh-" ter, at the expence of more important mat-" ters, is too dear a purchaſe." To this head are reducible ſuch turns of wit, as take their riſe from compariſons with religious ſubjects: To call ſuch jeſts profane, would be too ſevere, as by them religion itſelf is not expoſed. But ſuch jeſts afterwards occurring to our mind, on occaſion of ſuch ſubjects, we cannot poſſibly retain the due ſerioufneſs to which religion ſhould always bind us. The ſame judgment holds of the numberleſs idle ridiculous ſtories, accompanying matters of religion, and unjuſtifiable even at the bar of ſound criticiſm. An inſtance will explain my meaning: One preaching on the

the beatitudes, made ſo very poor a diſcourſe, as to tire his audience; upon which a perſon ſaid: "The Preacher has "forgot one beatitude; bleſſed are they, "who did not hear him." This jeſt does not make the text ridiculous, but may very eaſily diſcompoſe that ſerioufneſs which is neceſſary on reading this excellent portion of Scripture. All ſound judges of the ſtage will agree with me in condemning, as unpardonable, the making objects of weight and importance, and which claim our greateſt regard, eſpecially ſuch as have a relation to religion, the ſubject matter of comedy. The reaſon is, becauſe the ſtage is allotted for jeſt and mirth; which is altogether unſuitable on religious ſubjects. And thus a jeſt can never ſucceed, when either religion, or whatever claims our ſerious attention, is employed for the purpoſes of a jeſt; unleſs, which is more culpable, we make thoſe important matters themſelves the ſubject of our jeſts, or by means of them expoſe other things to ridicule.

63. Fourthly, a jeſt, in order to ſucceed, muſt

be adapted to circumſtances, In ſituation, where we are bound to obſerve a ſtrict and manly gravity, the leaſt tendency to laughter is blameable: and thus to give way to jeſts at ſuch a time, would be indecency and levity, tho' never ſo ingenious. There are perſons, in whoſe preſence we are to obſerve the ſtricteſt decorum, unleſs of themſelves they condeſcend to releaſe us in ſome meaſure from this conſtraint. Time and place alſo call for ſerioufneſs; for jeſts in ſuch circumſtances, tho' otherwiſe never ſo ſprightly, loſe much of their beauty, as being without the due decency, and proceeding from a too viſible levity of mind. Here I might run out into a wide field of criticiſm on the ſeveral ſpecies of jeſts: but I will adduce only a few, merely with a view to eſtabliſh the remark I have made. I have here more particularly in my eye; firſt, ſuch perſons as jeſt at the hour of death. Jeſts at that time, if otherwiſe fine, are in a certain reſpect of an uncommon ſprightlineſs. However, the hour of death is the moſt important period of life, a ſtep the moſt momentous we can poſſi-

poſſibly take. Then we are to undergo a change which claims our utmoſt attention and circumſpection; and demands the ſummoning and collecting together all the powers of our ſoul, in order to paſs out of time into eternity in as rational and manly a manner as poſſible. A thing impoſſible this, if we are not ſerious in the higheſt degree. Secondly, I reckon under this head, jeſts from the pulpit, which can never fully ſucceed and pleaſe, as coming from a place allotted for delivering the moſt awful and intereſting truths. And therefore a Preacher is never from the pulpit to expoſe vice to ridicule, but to combat it with the utmoſt ſerioufneſs from more ſolid principles. Laſtly, heroic poems, panegyrics, and all works of genius, that require nobleneſs and ſublimity of thought, may alſo ſerve as inſtances. A Poet, or an Orator, who jeſts in ſuch works, behaves indecently, he debaſes the ſublime, the noble, and the grand, by placing the ridiculous with it.

64. That particular beauty of a jeſt, which I have been hitherto conſidering, affords

fords a proper opportunity of criticiſing on a paſſage in the 8th book of Homer's Odyſſey, in which we have the ſtory of Venus and Mars, caught in Vulcan's net. The jeſt, which Homer on this occaſion puts into the mouth of Mercury, is highly indecent and inſipid: the whole is a ſmutty conceit, which fully ſets forth the impudent, cynical character of that God, regardleſs of all modeſty and decency. And Homer making the other Gods burſt out into loud laughter at this indecency, is putting the higheſt contempt upon them, as a ſet of vulgar, low beings; ſuch only being capable of entertaining ſo very immodeſt thoughts. This undoubtedly is one of thoſe paſſages, in which Homer, according to Horace, nodded. In this father of the Poets, it is but juſt, that all ludicrous Bards, Satiriſts, Comedians, &c. ſhould take a ſurvey of themſelves. Experience ſhews, that when we are once fully got into a vein of mirth and pleaſantry, we very eaſily loſe all command of reflection; generally then ſetting up for buffoons; and, inſtead of ingenious

plea-

pleaſantry, bring forth nothing but looſe and indecent conceits. And we uſually make up the want of the witty and ingenious, by ribaldry in a conceit, when we only deſign to raiſe a laugh. And thus a perſon of wit after being at length exhauſted, and incapable of deviſing any longer any thing ingenious, generally begins to utter obſcenity. But let what reaſon ſoever be alledged, ſuch ſmutty and indecent conceits are always blame-worthy.

CHAP. IV.

THE THIRD BEAUTY OF A JEST, TRUTH.

65. TRUTH is ſo neceſſary a property of a jeſt, that we may affirm, a falſe jeſt is no jeſt at all. Truth is the fundamental perfection of all our knowledge, which falls away at once, if without the ſupport of truth. Nay, a falſe knowledge is none at all, but barely appearance. A jeſt therefore, which conſiſts in an erroneous

neous and groundleſs thought may, indeed make a dazzling and ſhowy appearance, ſo long as we remain in error, and take it for a true thought: but its fire reſembles that of an ignis fatuus, which at a diſtance may deceive us, but, on a nearer view, we diſcover the deception. A jeſt therefore, which conſiſts in a falſe thought, can never have any true fire or ſprightlineſs, or any true beauty. So far as it is falſe, it is no real thought, but a mere deception, a blind and empty whim, which we muſt not view too near or too attentively, if we would enjoy the agreeable enchantment which it cauſes. And thus it is impoſſible, an untrue conception ſhould be a jeſt, much leſs, a ſprightly one. 'Tis at moſt but a jeſt in appearance, that can never ſtand the teſt. It is therefore evident without further proof, that a ſprightly jeſt muſt conſiſt in a juſt thought.

66. As a jeſt is a witty repreſentation of the ridiculous, §. 24, three things are requiſite to its truth. 1. The ridiculous, which is expoſed by the jeſt, muſt be actually in the

the object. If therefore things are exhibited as ridiculous by a jeſt, which are far from being ſo; or if ſomething ridiculous is ſuppoſed to be diſcovered in a thing, which either is not really ridiculous, or does not at all exiſt therein, it is a falſe jeſt. True religion, truth, virtue are objects no ways ridiculous, nor, ſo far as they are true, have they any thing ridiculous in them. All jeſts therefore on ſuch ſubjects, muſt neceſſarily be frigid, as being void of truth. And when, for inſtance, the enemies of religion and of the doctrines of the Monads, and other philoſophical points, wreſt the doctrines of religion and philoſophy, in order to wring out ſomething ridiculous, and procure matter for the exerciſe of wit; their jeſts may, indeed, be very ſprightly, on the ſuppoſition, that religion and philoſphy have this ridicule in them; but as this ſuppoſition falls of itſelf, the jeſt alſo loſes all its ſprightlineſs. 2. Objects which we repreſent to ourſelves in a jeſt, as different, muſt be actually ſo; and the differences, by which we mutually diſtinguiſh them, actually

tually belong to them. If thus in a ludicrous conceit, things are diſtinguiſhed aſunder, which either are not actually diſtinct, or not in the manner we would have, it is a falſe thought. 3. Objects, which we mutually compare, muſt actually agree or coincide mutually, actually reſemble, and be like each other, and the coincidences and particular agreements, by which we compare them together, really belong to them. And if thus in a ludicrous conceit we compare things together, which either do not mutually coincide at all, as they happen actually to differ, or agree not in the manner we want they ſhould, this is a falſe jeſt. Henry IV. of France, being told that a celebrated Phyſician of the reformed religion was gone over to the catholick communion, ſaid to the Duke of Sully, who was of the reformed religion; "My friend, your religion is in a "deſperate caſe, the Phyſicians have giv-"en it over." This jeſt is falſe: Had a celebrated Divine, who till then ſtiffly maintained the reformed religion, turned Catholick, this jeſt might be allowed to hold; but

a Phyſician, as ſuch, ſtands not in the ſame relation to his religion, as he does to a Patient: and if thus he quits his religion, his behaviour has no manner of ſimilitude with his quitting or giving over his Patient, of whoſe recovery he deſpairs.

67. My opinion concerning the truth of jeſts, as propoſed in the preceding paragraph, does by no means contradict thoſe Critics, who admit of untruths in jeſts: among whom Cicero is one, who in his ſecond book de Oratore ſays; *Perſpicitis hoc genus quam ſit facetum, quam elegans, quam oratorium, ſive habeas vere quod narrare poſſis, quod tamen eſt mendaciunculis aſpergendum, ſive fingas.* And thus he maintains, that a jeſt is very witty and ingenious, when either feigning ſomething, or mixing falſities with the truth. But theſe Critics conſider a jeſt in a quite different light from what I have done in the foregoing paragraph. When we ſpeak of a jeſt, we either conſider the objects, compared together in an ingenious and jocular manner, which we jeſt on, and borrow the jeſt from; or we conſider the thoughts themſelves,

ſelves, in which the jeſt conſiſts, and the ingenious and acute compariſon of the different objects, in order to diſcover the ridiculous. In this laſt view, no inaccurate thought, in my opinion, tho' even but a little lie, mendaciunculum, as Cicero ſpeaks, muſt be introduced in a jeſt. But in the firſt reſpect, a different judgment muſt be paſſed. The diſtinct things, which we compare together in an ingenious manner, in order to a jeſt, may be either true, or if not all, yet one of them may be falſe and fictitious. If the objects compared, and their ingenious compariſon itſelf, are juſt, the jeſt is true throughout, and contains not the leaſt inaccurate thought. A jeſt, which in this manner is true, is inconditionally or abſolutely ſo, and its truth may be called an inconditional or abſolute truth. A Biſhop in France happened to be out in his ſermon: ſome time after a lady ſeeing his picture, ſaid, "Good "God! what a likeneſs, one might ſay he "preaches." This jeſt contains an inconditional truth: for as the picture was as dumb as the Biſhop when in the pulpit, ſo

not only the things compared, but alſo the ingenious compariſon itſelf has its full and proper juſtneſs, and exhibits in a lively manner the Biſhop's perplexity.

68. But if in a jeſt the objects which, are compared in a jocular manner, are falſe and fictitious, tho' their compariſon is juſt, yet the whole of the jeſt is true only conditionally, and its truth may be called a conditional truth. Now whether the jeſter and the hearers, in conſequence of an error they are in, deem theſe things to be juſt, or are aware they are falſe, and on purpoſe deviſed for the jeſt's ſake; this conſtitutes no eſſential difference in ſuch jeſts as contain only a conditional truth. To the former may be reckoned all thoſe jeſts, which the heathens borrowed from their divinities, and other fabulous ſubjects, which they accounted true. Under which head we may place the celebrated jeſt we find in the Ancients, made by a perſon of wit, on occacaſion of Diana's temple at Epheſus being burnt to the ground. On the very night, in which this happened, Alexander the Great

was

was born. It was aſked, why Diana did not ſave her temple? and the Wit's anſwer was, "That "ſhe was abſent, attending on Olympias, "the mother of Alexander, in her labour." Tho' this jeſt contains nothing very ſprightly, yet I choſe to mention it by the bye, as being very famous, and ſerving here by way of illuſtration. I related a jeſt above, of one riding at full ſpeed after another, becauſe he had ſtolen his chin. In this jeſt there is a fiction, and by it the ridiculous in this adventure is diſcloſed. Jeſts, which contain only a conditional truth, cannot be rejected, without being obliged to deny all the beauties of fable and fiction, which would betray a groſs ignorance in works of genius. If a jeſt contains only the truth, which I conſidered §. 66, it may however be exceeding ſprightly. Only in this caſe all the rules of an ingenious and probable fiction are to be obſerved. In a word, the fiction is to be ſuch, as to appear to be fully true.

Ficta voluptatis cauſa ſint proxima veris.

HORAT.

69. Upon making a compariſon between jeſts, unconditionally or abſolutely juſt, and thoſe containing only a conditional truth, I prefer the firſt to the laſt; eſpecially if in other reſpects equally beautiful. Several reaſons may be given, why I deem my judgment in this particular to be juſt. An untruth, however, is always a thought, more imperfect, indeed, than a truth, if mutually alike in other reſpects. Be a jeſt never ſo ſprightly, if true only conditionally, it depends on the compariſon of objects, which are not of this, but of another poſſible and barely fictitious, world. Beſides, the wit, which forms its materials for jeſting by means of fiction, does not appear to me ſo ſtrong and vigorous. Such a wit may form fictions at pleaſure, add and retrench at will; ſo that it is no wonder, this method of jeſting ſhould ſucceed. It ſhould ſeem, ſuch a perſon deviſes his jeſt before hand, and afterwards finds out the proper occaſion for retailing it: in this reſembling a man, who firſt prepares his diſcourſe, and then looks out for a proper text to it. It is quite otherwiſe in the oppoſite caſe;

caſe; the Wit is then abſolutely tied down to the objects as they offer to his enquiry, and muſt in a moment be ſo formed, as that the conceit ſhall ſuit the objects, there being nothing left optional to him. I readily admit, that a jeſt which is only conditionally juſt, may ſometimes be far more ſprightly than a jeſt that is abſolutely true; eſpecially if the Jeſter himſelf does not deviſe the materials, but applies well-known fables and fictions for the purpoſes of a jeſt. In this laſt caſe, it is very little inferior to an abſolutely true jeſt. Of two jeſts, in other reſpects perfectly alike, that containing an unconditional truth, is more beautiful than a jeſt only conditionally juſt. Wit, which cannot find in this actual world and in the kingdom of truth, any materials for jeſting, ſeems to me not to be penetrating and clear-ſighted enough, to claim the character of ſprightly and lively.

CHAP. V.

THE FOURTH BEAUTY OF A JEST, VIVACITY.

70. THE livelineſs of our ſenſitive knowledge conſiſts in a high degree of our conſciouſneſs thereof, a ſimultaneous repreſentation of very many things therein at once. Conſequently, when we exhibit to ourſelves a great variety of thoughts and objects, which in conſequence of the firſt beauty muſt be found in a jeſt, §. 32—49, in a high degree of clearneſs, and have a ſtrong conſciouſneſs thereof; the jeſt is then clear and lively. A jeſt, poſſeſſed of all the beauties hitherto conſidered, but without clearneſs and vivacity, reſembles a region overſhadowed with darkneſs. Who in that caſe is capable of perceiving the variety and multiplicity of the objects, with which it is filled? But when clear and lively, its

its light then breaks forth: it then opens to our view a proſpect into a boundleſs field, for multiplicity and variety of objects; overwhelms us with a chaos of ideas, the unfolding of which we either have not time to attempt, or know not how to go readily about. It is not, indeed, diſtinct, does not exhibit to us all the parts, whereof it conſiſts, one after another ſingly or apart; but ſhews us the whole at once, and ſhines or flaſhes ſo bright, as to make us perceive and underſtand it. It is unneceſſary to ſhew at length, that this livelineſs is a genuine and neceſſary beauty in a jeſt. Who would venture to maintain, that a jeſt can remain ſuch, of which we have not the leaſt knowledge?

71. The requiſite livelineſs of a jeſt muſt needs evaporate, or at leaſt be greatly diminiſhed, when too long and diffuſe. It muſt therefore be very conciſe; or in other words, the conciſeneſs of a jeſt is neceſſarily connected with its livelineſs, This not only the eſſence of a jeſt requires, as conſiſting in a conciſe thought, §. 24; but it may be alſo pro-

proved, from its being otherwiſe devoid of the requiſite livelineſs. When the jeſt is too long, it muſt be unfolded or diſplayed, and the reſult is a diſtinct repreſentation: conſequently, no ſenſitive repreſentation any longer remains, and thus the jeſt is loſt, §. 24. A diſtinct repreſentation requires a conſiderable degree of reflection, and hence alſo ariſes a degree of ſerioufneſs, which quite marrs laughter or mirth. When the jeſt is too long, the ſeveral parts, whereof it conſiſts, are exhibited one after another to our attention, and then we have ſufficient time to conſider one part after another: conſequently, we feel not that dazzling light, and agreeable confuſion, which can no otherwiſe ariſe, but when we are at once overwhelmed with a multiplicity of ideas. It reſembles, in this caſe, the rays of light: As long as they remain ſcattered, they, indeed, produce a light, but yet not quite ſo ſtrong, reſplendent and piercing, as when collected by means of a burning glaſs, and drawn together in a ſingle point. A jeſt, indeed, muſt contain a great deal, §. 32—49. not diffuſed

ſed thro' a long ſeries of thoughts, but exhibited all at once to the mind. Much may alſo be ſaid in a few words. A ſingle thought is often the complex or ſummary of ſeveral repreſentations or ideas. In a jeſt much more is to be thought than expreſſed: We are only to give the hearer an opportunity of thinking a great deal, and by the jocular conceit agreeably forcing him to make reflections himſelf, in order alſo to conceive, what was not expreſſed.

Eſt brevitate opus, ut currat ſententia, neu ſe
Impediat verbis laſſas onerantibus aures.

HORAT.

72. In order to give a jeſt the neceſſary vivacity and conciſeneſs at the ſame time, it is in the moſt perfect manner to ſuit the very circumſtances, in which we find ourſelves, and in which the jeſt was propoſed. Under this head I include the perſons, with whom we converſe, with all the circumſtances of time, place, and converſation with which the company entertained themſelves till the very moment in which we want to jeſt: in

a word, the whole ſtate which we ſtand in with reſpect to our hearers. All theſe circumſtances, and ſituation muſt be as it were, the image or piece, and the jeſt the device or motto. Theſe circumſtances are to contain the grounds, the occaſion, and the whole explication of the jeſt, to be the key thereto: and thereby the jeſt becomes clear. Each one, who attended to the then circumſtances, underſtands it. The jeſt comes then juſt in the proper time, and hits ſo exactly all circumſtances, as thereby not only to ſhew that we diſcovered it, but that alſo we need expreſs but very little and yet be underſtood. Beſides, there alſo ariſes from this perfection of a jeſt, a peculiar pleaſure, in regard its extraordinary and perfectly adjuſted coincidence with all the circumſtances; a perfection, the ſenſe of which agreeably pleaſes.

Dulce eſt deſipere in loco.

HORAT.

The fineſt jeſts of this ſort are undoubtedly thoſe which ſo accurately ſuit all circumſtances,

ces, as in no other ſtate, under no other circumſtances, they are capable of being applied unaltered, and with the very ſame degree of ſprightlineſs. For, as in the world, two times, perfectly alike, are not poſſible, ſo it is a proof that a jeſt is not poſſeſſed of the higheſt degree of this perfection, or not perfectly ſuitable to all the circumſtances, if applicable more than once with equal ſprightlineſs. A perfectly happy jeſt can thus be only once applied, not to loſe any thing of its ſprightlineſs. I readily grant, there may be fine jeſts, which may be repeated a hundred times and that jeſts, which may be often repeated, may in other reſpects be much finer than thoſe that once only ſuit all the circumſtances. But, however, it is evidently a greater beauty in a jeſt to be applicable once only, than if capable of being often repeated in different circumſtances, without loſing any thing of its beauty. By this beauty of a jeſt, its livelineſs is further promoted in another manner. When a jeſt ſo accurately fits all the circumſtances, the perſon who underſtands it muſt at once recollect

collect the whole extent of his preſent ſtate. And what variety and multiplicity may not our ſtate each ſeveral moment contain? And thereby the jeſt gains a great degree of variety and livelineſs. Hence it is, that the ſprightly jeſts we have heard in a company, can with difficulty be told again, as it is not an eaſy matter duely to exhibit all the circumſtances attending the jeſt. Againſt this rule of jeſting, all facetious perſons ridiculouſly offend, whoſe thoughts run too ſlow and phlegmatic. They have the misfortune to be ſlow-thought-ridden, in conſequence of which they take too much time to diſplay their ideas. The flux of circumſtances is too rapid, too much on the wing for them; their imagination cannot keep pace therewith; their ſluggiſhneſs forces them, in many circumſtances, to loiter and lag behind; and then a ludicrous conceit ariſes ſomewhat too late. The company have already forgot, what the jeſt is grounded on; and perſons make themſelves ridiculous who want to force the company back, out of complaiſance to them, to recollect what is paſt

and

and gone. Whoever has a jeſt ſtrikes his mind after the opportunity is once vaniſhed, let him be ſilent and ſuppreſs it, if he would not ridiculouſly betray his ſlowneſs of wit, and gain the character of coming always too late.

73. A jeſt infallibly loſes its beauty, when it becomes diſtinct, or ſo far as it is a diſtinct repreſentation. Every diſtinct notion requires reflection and ſerious thought, in conſequence of which we exhibit to ourſelves the entire notion, not at once, but in parts or gradually. Conſequently, a repreſentation or idea, which we want in particular to render diſtinct, cannot have that livelineſs requiſite to a jeſt, §. 70. This we may affirm of all beauties indiſcriminately. The moment we form to ourſelves a diſtinct idea of a beauty, the beautiful directly vaniſhes, as what depends only on a ſenſation, and a confuſed indiſtinct repreſentation of perfection. Let a Geometrician take the dimenſions of the fineſt and moſt charming face, and expreſs the proportions of every part and feature in diſtinct numbers, and determine the ſituation

of

of each by mathematical principles; I dare affirm none will be charmed with ſuch a copy. But let the very ſame-face be drawn by a ſkilful Painter, it will appear in its full luſtre, and in all its charms and beauty. Thus a jeſt, in order to remain a beautiful ſenſitive repreſentation, muſt not in its greateſt and moſt conſiderable parts be diſtinct, and made the object of the underſtanding. Otherwiſe it cauſes it to be beautiful, and becomes much too ſerious a repreſentation ſufficiently to excite laughter. From this it therefore appears, why a jeſt becomes frigid, when a tedious comment is made on it, and when illuſtrated by a great many annotations; by this very thing it is changed to a diſtinct repreſentations or idea. All this muſt be left to the hearer, who may analize the jeſt as accurately and at as great length, and make as many notes on it, as he has a mind. It is kind of diſreſpect put upon the hearers to pretend to explain, and illuſtrate a jeſt by annotations. A perſon thereby gives them plainly to underſtand, he does not allow them penetration and acuteneſs enough, to per-

perceive and take the force of his jeſt. Many jocular facetious perſons are impertinently officious in this reſpect, and willing to ſave their hearers all trouble of reflection. This ſavours too much of ſelf-love, and ſelf-conceit. A jeſt, requiring a comment, or immediately backed with one, is in the firſt caſe actually frigid, and in the laſt, becomes ſo. Another defect, is ſtill more inſipid, which I ſhall only juſt mention. Many people, unqualified to jeſt in a ſprightly manner themſelves, are ſo over-officious to the company, as to illuſtrate other peoples jeſts: We might call them the ſcholiaſts of jeſters: and they are guilty of a double fault; as they not only put a ſlight on the company, by imagining none but themſelves had ſenſe enough to underſtand the jeſt; but as much as in them lies, they alſo weaken and damp the fire of ſuch ſprightly turns of wit.

74. The livelineſs of a jeſt conſiſts in a high degree of clearneſs and in our conſciouſneſs of it, §. 70. Conſequently, with reſpect to him, to whom it is to be ſuch, it

muſt be clear. Now as we have no conſciouſneſs of dark or obſcure repreſentations, a conceit, which is obſcure, is no jeſt at all, becauſe it ſtands in need of a comment. Obſcurity therefore is one of the greateſt deformities of a jeſt. We ſhould certainly laugh at many a conceit of Cicero, Horace and other ingenious Ancients, were they not too obſcure to us, who have not the key. Cicero and Quintilian mention a jeſt, which is expreſſed by the words pyxis Cœliana. They commend it as an uncommon jocular conceit. But as the Critics have taken a great deal of pains to no purpoſe, to come at the grounds of this jeſt, it is obſcure and unintelligible at this day, and we cannot poſſibly therefore conſider it as ſuch. The Emperor Sigiſmund, at his death, left a very young and beautiful widow. One of her relations adviſed her never to marry again, for this reaſon only, that ſhe ought to imitate the turtle-dove, The Empreſs replied, "Why would you not rather have me imi-
"tate the dove?" A perſon, who knows not, that the turtle-dove is ſaid never to

pair

pair again, after the loſs of her mate, but that other doves do; to ſuch a one this jocular conceit is obſcure, and thereby loſes all its ſprightlineſs. I am far from maintaining, that each ſprightly jeſt muſt be underſtood by the vulgar; for in ſuch a caſe it muſt certainly be very frigid and inſipid, as they are generally ſo themſelves. We are rather to maintain, that a ſprightly jeſt muſt needs be unintelligible to the witleſs and dull. I mean only, that a ſprightly jeſt muſt never be obſcure and unintelligible to the witty and ingenious, acquainted with the circumſtances to which the jeſt refers, and with the things compared together therein in an ingenious manner. To thoſe obſcure jeſts, which I here cenſure, we may reckon all ſuch conceits, as are too far-fetched, too deep and forced, too hard to be underſtood, too pedantic and learned, and which require too much reflection before they can be underſtood. This obſcurity may be owing to ſeveral reaſons. When a jocular facetious perſon does not adapt his jeſts to the occaſion and circumſtances;

when in the preſent circumſtances, there does not occur any, or but a very ſlender, ground for the ludicrous conceit; when the thoughts, from which the reſt eaſily flows, are omitted, and only thoſe expreſſed from which with difficulty the reſt may be diſcovered; when the particulars compared are very minute and unobſervable; when the entire jeſt is founded on learned matters which can only be known to the Learned, &c. In theſe ſituations the jeſt muſt needs be obſcure to moſt witty perſons: For inſtance, when one, in a joke, calls a Midwife, a Syncope; a Philologiſt only can laugh at this. A happy jeſt muſt therefore be unforced, eaſy to be underſtood, and ſo diſplay the ludicrous as not to give the hearer who wants to divert himſelf readily the trouble to beat his brains, to underſtand it. There are many, who amidſt a large company are notwithſtanding alone. They in ſilence have their own ſeries of repreſentations or ideas, and when any thing ludicrous ariſes in their minds, they produce it without further ado, and are much ſurpri-

ſed,

ſed, that others join not with them in the laugh. The jeſts of ſuch people are dark to their hearers, as being unacquainted with what gave riſe to them. Such jocular perſons, in order to ſucceed, ſhould condeſcend to impart the ideas which preceeded the jeſt, or ſhew the company the complaiſance of being preſent both in ſoul and body. Otherwiſe their conceits cannot poſſibly be underſtood; and thus they expect in vain to have them honoured with a laugh.

75. The novelty of a thought is always a ſource of extraordinary light and of a peculiar degree of clearneſs. A'repreſentation, even by its novelty becomes clear and lively in the ſoul; and therefore a ludicrous conceit, in order to ſucceed, muſt be new and till then unknown. To underſtand this aright, we are to diſtinguiſh in a jeſt the objects, by the ingenious compariſon of which the ridiculous is diſcloſed, from the ingenious diſcloſure of the ridiculous itſelf. The objects themſelves, compared together in a jeſt, muſt not be unknown: otherwiſe

the jeſt will be obſcure and unintelligible; and this is one of the greateſt defects of a jeſt, §. 74. Conſequently, in each jeſt, the objects from which the jeſt is taken, muſt be either ſufficiently known already, or be ſufficiently explained and made known to the hearers, previous to the propoſing the jeſt. The novelty of a jeſt therefore is to be found in the ingenious diſcovery of the ridiculous, or in the ludicrous, and in the nature of a jeſt. In a new one, either ſomething ridiculous muſt be diſcovered, not yet known, or not to our hearers; or objects muſt be mutually compared, never yet compared by any other; or in ſuch a manner, as has not yet been done, ſo far as we diſcover particulars of compariſon, never yet diſcovered by any other. There are various degrees of novelty. A thing may remain a long time new, tho' its novelty is conſtantly on the decreaſe. And thus I would not inſiſt, that a new jeſt muſt be repeated only once. Such a jeſt has, indeed, the greateſt degree of novelty; but yet it may be ſtill called new, tho' repeatedly

edly thought on, and uttered or propoſed.

76. When I ſay, a happy jeſt muſt be a thing new and unknown, I mean not this only as to the perſons hearing, but alſo as to the perſon uttering the jeſt. A man uttering a jeſt he long before knew, either as what he formerly deviſed, or what he learned from any other, diſcovers in that reſpect no great force of acumen; as he has only occaſion for his memory, and is but a bare relater, capable of telling another man's jeſt, without being a wit or a jeſter himſelf. It is true, if ſuch a jeſt is till then new and unknown, it may produce all the agreeable effects of a ſprightly jeſt. The relater of the jeſt needs only conceal his knowing it before. Yet for all this, ſuch a jeſt has a defect, differing from other defects only in not being ſo obſervable. When a perſon forms the jeſt juſt ſuddenly and opportunely, he will be ſo ſtruck with its novelty, as to utter it in a much briſker and more agreeable manner than if it had been ſomething old. However, a jeſt, in order to ſucceed, muſt be till then new

and unknown. If already often heard, it loſes that all that charm and all that fire or ſprightlineſs, which it could never have, but from its novelty.

77. What is new, has a beauty and a charm, which the old, as ſuch, muſt be without. What is old, gradually becomes ſo familiar as not to ſeem worthy of any peculiar attention; either as we imagine we have already ſufficiently conſidered it, or as in conſequence of that extraordinary impulſe of curioſity by which we are inceſſantly urged, we hanker after an encreaſe of knowledge, or that we are naturally diſguſted to conſider the ſame thing frequently; as in that caſe we cannot promiſe to ourſelves any new occaſion of knowledge, which abſolutely conſtitutes a defect of perfection. Be this as it may, experience ſhews, that our attention to old or familiar repreſentations diminiſhes; but what is new engroſſes all our attention, and excites a kind of agreeable aſtoniſhment. The ſoul ſecretly exults in her encreaſe and new acceſſion of knowledge, as what, in general,

is

is a perfection. In ſhort, every repreſentation, which is quite new to us, ſhines with a light much too charming not to afford us ſatisfaction. It is true, there are ſome perſons who have an averſion from every new object, being ſo very fond of antiquity as to peruſe with higher delight the inſcription on an old ruſty medal, than to conſider the proof of any new truth. I not only allow, that what is antique may pleaſe on other accounts; but I alſo aſſert, that oftentimes a fondneſs for antiquity is in fact but a fondneſs for novelty. The greateſt antiquary would never with pleaſure peruſe a muſty manuſcript were it not a thing new to him. Nature therefore is ever uniform and like herſelf. Antiquity, as ſuch, can never yield us that lively pleaſure which novelty does; as in that reſpect our thoughts about it are ſomething new. Novelty therefore is a beauty in a jeſt, which not only enhances its livelineſs, but alſo enlivens its charms. Beſides, the novelty of a jeſt infallibly proves the jeſter to be the inventor. The vigour and force of his acu-

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men undeniably appear, and give the jeſt a charm which fills the hearers with an agreeable aſtoniſhment. A jeſt, in order to be ſprightly, muſt be either quite new, or at leaſt have ſomething novel in it.

78. A jeſt tranſmitted from father to ſon, muſt needs be inſipid. On hearing many jokes which dull perſons value themſelves upon, we might be tempted to think there were family-jokes handed down time immemorial. Nothing can be more natural, indeed, than for a ſon to admire the jeſts of his jocular father, and imprint them deeply on his memory. I am much miſtaken, if moſt of the jokes we hear in common converſation, are not hereditary; only, as it uſually happens in all oral traditions, they have undergone ſome change in the conveyance. A jeſt, in order to pleaſe men of wit, and perſons of a refined taſte, muſt either not wholly, or which is better, not at all be known to our anceſtors. What the multitude or vulgar approve, can be no rule, their taſte is vitiated, and therefore they are mightily pleaſed with jokes of inheri-

heritance. But it is ever an indication of the inſipidity of a jeſt when it pleaſes perſons of dullneſs, what Horace ſaid, remaining a certain truth,

Nec, ſi quid fricti ciceris probat & nucis emtor,
Æquis accipiunt animis, donantive corona.

However, I deny not but that our anceſtors jeſted in a ſprightly manner. And we meet in ancient writers with excellent jeſts, new to many who never peruſed them. I only mean to ſay that moſt hereditary jokes are low, and that ſprightly jeſts come at laſt to loſe ſomewhat of their fire or ſprightlineſs, after an uninterrupted tranſmiſſion from father to ſon.

79. Novelty, a beauty ſo conſiderable in a ſprightly jeſt, requires, a witty conceit ſhould never become common or familiar. In jeſts as in compliments, which are only cuſtomary modes of ſpeech, repeated with a bow, without reflection, barely on account of faſhion. And thus ſome jeſts, which at firſt perhaps were pretty enough, on being cuſtomarily uttered on certain

certain occaſions, become inſipid and languid. A perſon but tolerably converſant in in the world, will have obſerved many ſuch trite jeſts. The reigning mode is to borrow ludicrous conceits from objects that ſhock modeſty, decency and chaſtity: To ſuch things numberleſs alluſions are made. Perſons intending to entertain the fair ſex, uſe this method. Immodeſt and looſe people, ſet up a laugh, and pleaſe themſelves with ſuch conceits. But did not virtue forbid, yet ſuch jeſts are blameable barely on their being without due novelty, and being too much hackneyd. It is true, trite jeſts, will always find many Patrons, and the perſon who utters them, be always admired.

Un ſot trouve toujours un plus ſot qui l'admire.

BOILEAU.

But ſhould ſuch common jeſts be never fine, a perſon who values himſelf upon them in company, is but a bare common-place book, an index of ſuch jeſts. And hence we may always obſerve, low people, who would

would fain jeſt, but have not wit enough for it, to have recourſe to trite jeſts, as being incapable of inventing.

80. To the novelty of a jeſt, in ſome meaſure, is oppoſed the borrowing of a jeſt from an other, or giving it out as one's own. In this caſe a kind of learned plagiariſm is committed. As ſoon as this plagiariſm is diſcovered, the jeſt loſes much of its beauty, being no longer conſidered as the produce of the plagiary. And even ſhould this plagiariſm remain undiſcovered, the jeſt loſes in beauty, only with this difference, that the hearers are not apprized of it. Whoever utters ſtolen wit, muſt, if not loſt to all ſhame, anxiouſly dread a diſcovery by his hearers; and in that caſe they know the jeſt, and muſt conſider the relater as a ſpeaking-trumpet only, thro' which the diſtant inventer of the jeſt communicates his jocular conceit. When a perſon utters the ludicrous conceits of another as his own, he can very rarely keep up that decent aſſurance which is requiſite to expreſs a happy jeſt. Nay, the jeſt may

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in the mouth of its inventer have had a great deal of ſprightlineſs, which is loſt when realed by another; as both may have happened in different circumſtances, which however muſt always exactly ſuit, for the jeſt to ſucceed. I will admit a caſe may happen in which none is apprized of the plagiariſm; then the borrower retails the jeſt with the moſt decent aſſurance, and it may appear excellent and perfectly ſuit all the then circumſtances. However, it is undeniable, ſuch a borrowed jeſt wants a beauty, tho' unobſerved in this caſe; and with reſpect to the borrower it is known, he being only a bare relater of it. A witty perſon, who out of a noble pride ſtands upon his honour, muſt never ſteal a jeſt. The braggart Thraſo, in Terence, was guilty of this fault, giving out the conceit of another as his own.

Gn. *Tuumne, obſecro te, hoc dictum erat? Vetus credidi.*

Th. *Audieras?* Gn. *Sæpe, & fertur inprimis.* Th. *Meum eſt.*

I would therefore adviſe each ludicrous, facetious

cetious perſon, never to the retail jeſts of others. If incapable of inventing lucky jeſts, he would do much better not to jeſt at all, than to be ſo inconſiderate as to endanger betraying the barrenneſs of his wit; or when we repeat the lucky jeſts of others in a very happy manner, and agreeably entertains our hearers, we ſhould afterwards have the honeſty to diſclaim any right to the conceit as our property. The ſame judgment we are to paſs on thoſe, who by reading witty and ingenious Authors have collected a ſtore of witty and pleaſant conceits, which they retail on all occaſions, without mentioning whence they were taken. We cannot oftentimes refuſe them the reputation of happy and dexterous imitators. A Bayle, a Fontenelle may be the fathers of many little Bayles and Fontenelles. But ſuch ingenious copiers ſhould have the modeſty not to claim the honour of a wit of the firſt rate till after having diſtinguiſhed themſelves by witty conceits of their own growth. To be a fair copy, is an honour.

but

but to be a fair original is a much greater and a more diſtinguiſhing honour.

81. Let a thing once be never ſo new, it in time becomes antiquated. All things in this world are ſubject to decay and ſenility. A jeſt therefore never ſo ſprightly, in time becomes frigid, when too often repeated. And thus to ſucceed in jeſting, one and the ſame jeſt muſt not be repeated too often. The beſt meſſes, if too often heated, loſe their agreeable flavour. A jeſt, never ſo happily hit the firſt time, loſes ſomething of its life, when uttered a ſecond to the ſame hearers, and much more when a third time, &c. In time we may hear without the leaſt emotion, what at firſt cauſed a hearty laugh; and the pleaſure felt till then, changes to a diſguſt againſt thoſe who venture to put us off with the ſame conceit ſo often.

Ridetur chorda qui ſemper oberrat eadem.

HORAT.

A jeſt ſo often ſerved up becomes too familiar and trite; and we may juſtly imagine, a wit not to be extraordinary great and fruitful which appears to have exhaſted

itſelf

itſelf by one ſingle lucky jeſt, which it is always harping upon. A perſon guilty of this fault, ſhews too little reſpect for his hearers. He offers an affront either to their memory, imagining the ſame thing may conſtantly appear new; or to their wit, penetration and taſte, as incapable of underſtanding his conceits; or conſiders them as a ſet of trifling people that are tickled and made merry on the ſlighteſt occaſion. All this can do no great honour to a jeſter in the opinion of his hearers and readers. A jeſt, that has once ſucceeded, ſhould not be repeated a ſecond time before the ſame perſons. It would however be ridiculous to attempt the fixing what number of repetitions may be admitted. Experience ſhews, the ſame jeſt may ſometimes by a perſon of wit and fine taſte bear a ſecond and a third hearing with a ſenſible pleaſure; but repeated eight or ten times over, cauſes either an indifference, or a diſguſt. The ſame may be ſaid of every witty thought and ingenious conceit.

82. I cannot here avoid remarking, a

fault many are guilty of: They will force themſelves, coſt what it will, on the company for pleaſant and agreeable companions; collect a number of little droll, and often entertaining ſtories, which, when in the humour, they are ſure to retail one after another, in all companies, with great ſelf-complacency. Their wit is ſo depraved, they cannot be merry, and in good humour, without telling their little trifling tales. Whenever they are about to take up the thread of ſtory-telling, any who knows them well, is ſure to ſay: "Ay, Ay, now come the ſto-"ries; you'll be in good humour, it is to be "hoped." You cannot cauſe a greater pain than to interrupt them, as they are juſt beginning, and to go on with the ſtory yourſelf. Yet I know one in particular, who, tho' aſſured, the ſtory was already perfectly well known, would notwithſtanding go on with it. Beſides, that it is indecent to detain the company with ſuch ſtale conceits, repeated a hundred times over, it is an indication of a languid, inſipid, ſtale wit, to repeat too frequently one and the ſame ludicrous tale. Should theſe living chronicles

pretend

pretend that the company laugh and ſeem well-pleaſed, I would only have them to conſider, all this may be the effect of a forced complaiſance, ſhewn them from perſons being obliged, on other accounts, to have intercourſe with them.

83. Another fault, oppoſed to that beauty of a jeſt, which flows from its novelty, conſiſts in filing or ſtringing jeſt upon jeſt. Each jeſt apart may be very fine, and propoſed ſeparately have all the fire and ſprightlineſs, requiſite to a pleaſant and happy jeſt: But as it is drowned amidſt a number of others, it cools and loſes of its fire, like an exquiſite diſh, after having eaten before plentifully of others. We tire with laughing; are fond of change and variety: a pleaſure, holding too long in one uniform tenor, turns at length languid and unaffecting. Jeſts, never ſo happy, excite but one uniform delight. And thus, when a ſtring of jeſts ſucceed too quick one upon another, the following muſt loſe more of their fire, at the greater diſtance they are from the firſt, till the laſt of all turns quite frigid. All ſen-

ſitive delights, ſcrewed up to the higheſt pitch, naturally pall. To feel a ſucceſſion of ſprightly jeſts, one upon the back of another, with an equal degree of livelineſs, is a thing unnatural: the laſt having ever a leſs degree of novelty, as producing only, or rather propagating and ſpinning out the ſame pleaſure already excited by the foregoing, as by a cauſe only ſomewhat different. That a train of jeſting, continued too long, without intermiſſion, ſhould prove irkſome, is all together natural. Jeſts therefore to be perfectly fine, ſhould not be too numerous, nor too quick one upon another. To aſſert, that a jeſt, which in itſelf is ſprightly, may be propoſed, without reflecting, whether propoſed at the proper time, is a maxim highly prejudicial to the ſupreme beauty of a jeſt. A perſon of a jocular turn is not to be a waſter, but a frugal manager, to lay up in ſtore for the time to come. If at times he has too great a flow of ludicrous conceits upon him, he ought to conſider, times of ſcarcity and dearth may enſue. Perſons often in too pleaſant and humorous a vein, have a wit that enſlaves them, reſembling

ſing a violent current, not to be reſtrained when once it has broke thro' its dam. And again, it is true, a man tho' never ſo witty, may not always be in the humour of jeſting.

84. I inſiſt not, that by all the rules, hitherto deduced from the novelty requiſite to a jeſt, the jeſter himſelf muſt be always the firſt inventer. Thoſe jeſts, it is true, are ever the fineſt when firſt created and propoſed: but a jeſt invented by another, or by oneſelf, may be repeated ſeveral times, without prejudice in the leaſt to the rule of novelty, when done with ſome alterations. Conſequently, the jeſter may with ſome truth affirm, he has deviſed ſomething in the jeſt, the moment he utters it, tho' it cannot be allowed equal merit with thoſe quite new. Thus in the ſciences: Truth, may be borrowed from others, if propoſed with ſome alterations and additions, or proved in a different manner, or having other conſequences deduced from them, &c. and we may claim ſome ſhare in the invention of theſe truths: And ſo we may borrow the jeſts of others; a ſmall circumſtance which

we either deduct or add, entitles us to give it as in part our own: And if we propoſe it in other circumſtances, in other caſes, and are capable ſo aptly to do this, as to appear we have naturally fallen on this ludicrous conceit, then it is not deſtitute of all novelty. Some Profeſſors in Schools and Univerſities have a ſet of jeſts which they regularly retail every whole or every half year. What we are to think of ſuch periodical conceits, is eaſy to be judged.

85. To the novelty of a jeſt, beſides what I have hitherto adduced, it is moreover required, that amidſt a whole ſeries of repreſentations or ideas, which at the time employ the mind of the jeſter and company, it ſhall be a new phænomenon or repreſentation in the ſoul. And this is not only procured, when previous to the jeſt, ſeveral repreſentations of different ſpecies have preceeded in the mind: but alſo, when in the moment the jeſt is deviſed, the mind is filled with ſeveral repreſentations of a different ſpecies; not only that of the jeſter, but of the company too. Both of them are to have,

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1. previous to the jeſt, a ſtrong impreſſion on their mind of other very different repreſentations, ſtanding in no very near reſemblance and connection with the jeſt as ſuch: both of them to have their attention employed in a high degree on quite different ſubjects, ſo as not to have the leaſt ſurmiſe of the jeſt; which by this means acquires a luſtre to a degree of aſtoniſhment, proves a new phænomenon in the ſoul, which was a conſiderable time before taken up with quite different thoughts. In this caſe the jeſt produces ſo ſudden a ſhifting of the ſcene in our thoughts, as to cauſe a kind of tranſmutation and a ſpecies of diſorder in and amidſt our repreſentations, not poſſible to be felt without pleaſure and aſtoniſhment. The jeſter ſhews in the plaineſt manner, with what eaſe he can jeſt, and diſcovers a great ſtrength of wit and acumen; capable thus amidſt ſo many other different ideas to produce a jeſt, §. 22, 23. Conſequently the jeſt by this very means acquires a degree of beauty, §. 21. This is the reaſon that the jeſts a Profeſſor in an Univerſity pro-

poſes, amidſt the delivery of more profound and abſtracted truths, if in other reſpects but ſprightly enough, are uſually ſo agreeable; namely becauſe the attention was before employed on quite different thoughts, as diſtinct from ludicrous conceits as night from day. 2. The jeſter and company are to be in a ſtate of mind, in which ideas of a different complexion ſhall cauſe a ſtrong impreſſion on the mind; in particular the jeſter is to have his head filled with thoughts that take up his attention much, and that have no remarkable reſemblance and connection with the jeſt. Amidſt ſuch repreſentations the jeſt is to burſt forth like the ſun from under a cloud. The company are to be in a like frame of mind; their ſoul to reſemble a theatre, and the jeſt, an interlude in a theatrical performance. In ſuch circumſtances, it is very probable no other perſon could have had fallen on this jocular conceit, and conſequently it will have an undeniable novelty; and thereby obtaining a degree of livelineſs, which amidſt other repreſentations ſimilar thereto it would be without; and

and the diverſity of the other thoughts conſiderably heightening its luſtre; it will ſtand forth in the croud of other thoughts, like a young beauty in a group of aged Matrons. This degree of beauty will be obtained in a ſtill higher degree, if the jeſt happens at a time, we and the company are engaged in thougths, quite oppoſite to the ludicrous conceit. *Oppoſita, juxta ſe poſita, magis luceſcunt.*

86. A ſprightly jeſt, in order to have a due novelty and livelineſs, muſt, in conſequence of the reflections in the preceeding paragraph, be entirely unexpected: Neither in our preceeding thoughts, nor in thoſe we actually entertain at the time, muſt any ground of ſurmiſe for a ludicrous conceit appear. What we expect, we anticipate in thought, and when afterwards coming actually to exiſt, it can never produce any thing new to the mind. An expected jeſt, therefore, can never be ſo ſprightly as one unexpected; the latter being new to us, cauſes a pleaſing ſurpriſe without leaving ſufficient time for much reflection. In ſuch circumſtances, a jeſt, in other reſpects very

ry faulty, may pleaſe us much. And thus the unexpectedneſs of a jeſt is a means to conceal its defects. When the company expect a jeſt, they are prepared for it in a manner very tickliſh for the jeſter; collect all their critical forces, as they have a right to hear ſomething extraordinary fine and ingenious: And in that caſe the jeſt muſt be extremely ſprightly, or we greatly diſappoint their hopes, and turn the pleaſure they propoſed to themſelves, to a contemptuous ſneer. Let us therefore be careful not to raiſe expectation. To comply with this rule, we muſt avail ourſelves of a kind of ſtratagem; give the company hopes of a quite different turn of wit, and before they are aware, diſappoint their hopes; not mentioning what they look'd for, but a ludicrous conceit they did not expect. Cicero thinks the pleaſure ariſing from ſuch a deception, owing to the pleaſure which our errors, after the diſcovery, yield us. But, methinks, this cannot be the true reaſon: An error is an imperfection, and an imperfection can never give us pleaſure, as ſuch.

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The error in this caſe makes the ludicrous conceit ſtrike with ſurpriſe and unexpectedly, and it is that which gives the pleaſure. My readers will perceive, that particular inſtances of jeſts for the rules hitherto propoſed, are altogether unneceſſary. A jeſt acquires the degree of beauty we have been conſidering, from the circumſtances in which it is propoſed, and which ſuperſede all illuſtration by example.

87. When by long ſtudying on a thing we want to make its repreſentation clear, by means of others which greatly reſemble it, or belong to the ſame ſpecies, and are much connected with it; ſuch a jeſt, by long engaging our thoughts, or taking much time to find out, can never be ſufficiently unexpected, nor therefore happily ſucceed. By this ſlowneſs in producing a jeſt, we plainly enough ſhew, our acumen to be far from poſſeſſing that vivacity and life requiſite to give birth to a ſprightly jeſt immediately, upon repreſentations or thoughts of quite a different ſpecies and nature. A happy jeſt muſt be the effect of an acumen ſo briſk, as not to need

need long previous preparation and reflection: The birth-pangs muſt not hold too long, the acumen muſt bring forth with eaſe and in an inſtant. Whoever is obliged to pauſe long on a jeſt, will with difficulty guard againſt expoſing his whiffling wit, and the pains he is at in a jeſt; the time will ſeem long to the hearers: and if at length the jeſt is brought forth, it will either not be new and unexpected enough, or, on account of its meanneſs, greatly diſappoint expectation. A ſlow wit very rarely ſucceeds at a jeſt. A jeſt, to be luckily hit, muſt all on a ſudden be ſo clear in the mind of the jeſter as to put him into a kind of aſtoniſhment, which cannot fail to yield him a lively pleaſure upon his own jeſt. This pleaſure cauſes a ſtrong deſire of communicating it; and hence ariſes an undaunted boldneſs, without which the happieſt is but poorly expreſſed.

88. Let whoever will ſucceed in jeſting, beware of premeditation: Whoever premeditates, and goes all that while with jeſt till the time of delivery, cannot fail to meet

meet with a miſcarriage, §. 87. Cicero has remarked this defect, de Oratore, Lib. II. when he ſays; *quia meditata videntur, minus ridentur. Quintilian, de Inſtit. Orator. Lib. VI.* in like manner diſſuades premeditating a jeſt; *ne præparatum, aut domo allatum videatur, quod dicimus.* Whoever ſtudies long on a jeſt, can never command that undaunted and proper boldneſs, requiſite to the happily expreſſing it. His ſmirking eyes and writhed mouth will ſhew he has a jeſt on his ſtomach, which he would fain diſcharge. With the greateſt anxiety, which he cannot well conceal, is he watching an opportunity to hatch his jeſt. Is it to be imagined, ſuch a jeſt can be ſufficiently new, either to the jeſter or to the company? which is, however, what conſtitutes ſo neceſſary a beauty in a ſprightly jeſt. Beſides, it is not poſſible to foreſee whether a jeſt will properly ſuit all emergent circumſtances; and therefore we may apprehend, premeditated jeſts may be untimely produced: eſpecially as the time will generally ſeem too tedious to the jeſter to go long

long with jeſt before delivery, and rather than wait, he will blunder it out unſeaſonably. And for this reaſon alſo, it is a fault to premeditate a jeſt, §. 72.

89. If in conſequence of what we have hitherto ſaid on a happy jeſt, we are to uſe no manner of premeditation; as little are we ſtudiouſly to contrive the circumſtances, in which a jeſt is applicable: they muſt offer of themſelves, without any effort on our part; and we are only to lay hold on and improve them. And then we manifeſt the promptneſs of our wit, and the jeſt is unexpected. Perſons betray the feebleneſs and phlegmatic ſlowneſs of their wit who previouſly con the part they are to act in company: A jeſt plainly miſcarries by ſuch a conduct; eſpecially if ſuch perſons are impatient to wait calmly the proper time for applying it happily, and evidently ſhew they are contriving an opportunity for their jeſt: as then the danger of miſcarriage is ſtill greater. I own it is not poſſible at all times to prevent the company's obſerving our premeditation of a jeſt, tho' in other

reſpects

reſpects it may be fine: I only affirm, that this is a very difficult taſk, and that ſuch a jeſt, if without the due degree of novelty, will ſucceed but rarely,

90. From what I have ſaid, it appears, that quick, unexpected anſwers or repartees greatly pleaſe, becauſe it could not poſſibly be foreſeen what another would aſk: and thus the leaſt ſuſpicion of premeditation is precluded. Such a jeſt, if not quite inſipid, muſt be more ſprightly than a jeſt uttered when no queſtions are aſked; as in this caſe it is rare we can eſcape the ſuſpicion of premeditation: But in repartee, above all other jeſts, the promptneſs of the wit is evident. Cicero obſerved this beauty in the place ſo often quoted, and added the reaſon: *Nam et ingenii celeritas major eſt, quæ apparet in reſpondendo, et humanitatis eſt reſponſio.* A Swiſs Soldier once addreſſed Henry IV. of France in the following bold manner: "Pleaſe your Majeſty, permit "me only three words; *pay or diſcharge.*" The King inſtantly replied; "Soldier, make "them four; *neither one nor other.*"

Nay,

Nay, we may affirm, that the quickneſs of an anſwer often heightens a jeſt, in other reſpects not ſo ſprightly. A Pariſian Lady being at Verſailles, went to Court; as the King obſerved her approach very near his perſon, he ordered a certain Dutcheſs to rally her. The Dutcheſs begged her to draw nearer, and then aſked her: "What fool is "fitteſt to wear horns?" The Lady directly anſwered: "A Duke, Madam."

91. Whoever would ſucceed in jeſting, muſt not ſhew he has a jeſt in his head. I do not mean, to expoſe him who expreſsly declares before-hand his intention to jeſt. Whoever is guilty of this, acts prepoſterouſly. But I mean to cenſure a more common fault; which is the putting on ſuch an air and practiſing ſuch geſtures, as are always the whifflers or harbingers of a jeſt. Such a perſon cannot poſſibly jeſt before he has ſcrewed his face into a certain affected form. When the company can foreſee, by theſe indications, that a jeſt is coming, it is always ſure to be ſpoiled. To this we may alſo add another fault, which

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is, when a jeſter laughs ſo heartily himſelf, before he has told the jeſt; and which is ſtill worſe, cannot tell it for laughing. This is an indication not only of a childiſh diſpoſition, incapable of commanding itſelf; but ſuch untimely laughter quite marrs the jeſt.

92, From what has been obſerved, it appears, why ſuch jeſts as ariſe in our mind when wholly engaged in ſerious thoughts, and propoſed to a company at the ſame time equally grave, cannot fail of ſucceeding. For, the ſerious is oppoſed to the jocular and facetious; and ſuch a jeſt is certainly quite unexpected and new to the company. If the jeſter's dexterity goes ſtill farther, ſo as to be able to jeſt amidſt mournful and melancholy thoughts, his jeſts acquire a ſtill greater degree of beauty in this reſpect. A diminution of ſorrow is always ſomething agreeable: and a pleaſure, which leſſens or diſpels gloomy dejection, is ſtill more agreeable. A jeſt therefore,

which is propoſed in ſuch a manner, as that it

———*amara læto*
Temperet riſu,

HORAT.

muſt be much more pleaſant than any other, if not proceeding from levity and inconſiderateneſs of mind, and not inconſiſtent with the requiſite dignity and decency of a jeſt, §. 62, 63. Hence it comes, that we are aſtoniſhed at a perſon able to jeſt when a limb is ſevering or acute pains felt, or a great calamity grappling with, or even at death; as we are told of Socrates, the Emperor Adrian, and Margaret of Auſtria. In ſuch circumſtances all jeſts, on account of their unexpectedneſs, have a peculiar degree of novelty, and indicate an extraordinary livelineſs of wit; tho' we muſt own, ſuch jeſts are in other reſpects blameable.

93. When ſerious thoughts are uppermoſt in the mind, an air of ſeriouſneſs naturally overſpreads the countenance and appears from every motion of it. But when

udi-

ludicrous thoughts prevail, unleſs we reſtrain ourſelves from laughing; every look, geſture, and motion put on a laughing air. A perſon therefore who in telling a jeſt cannot be ſerious, plainly ſhews, his ludicrous thoughts are uppermoſt; conſequently, his jeſts are without the beauty and excellence ariſing from the vigour and perfection of acumen, which enables, amidſt ſtrong repreſentations or thoughts of a different kind, to hit on ludicrous conceits. In order to jeſt happily, ſeriouſneſs muſt prevail, amidſt the jeſt, both in the ſoul and in the countenance: otherwiſe we give into a ludicrous extreme, and as the exerciſe of the judging faculty is obſtructed, run out into extravagant flights and buffoonry. I do not mean that a perſon ſhould look ſour and gloomy, when jeſting; but that the ſerious ſhould have the prevalency over the ludicrous. We muſt be able to ſay of a jeſter,

Incolumi gravitate, jocum tentavit.

HORAT.

In a word, to jeſt happily, one muſt reſemble a *Craſſus, qui cum omnium eſſet venuſtiſſimus*

tiſſimus, omnium graviſſimus, & ſeveriſſimus & erat & videbatur; according to the teſtitimony of Cicero de Orat. Lib. II.

94. And hence an occaſion offers of criticizing a fault, obſervable in many perſons of wit and pleaſantry. Their acumen ſeems to reſemble all natural bodies, which move not till puſhed on or impelled by other bodies: It lies dormant in a ſtate of inactivity till another perſon begins to jeſt; and then it rouſes, and begins to be put in motion. Perſons of this ſort of wit, draw from a ſingle jeſt they hear, a whole ſtring of jeſts, till they often carry the matter too far, and conclude the ſtring with a poor conceit, which often, tho' accidentally, entirely ſpoils the firſt jeſt. And thus we might affirm, one ſprightly wit may impart a warmth and glow to many others: We are not to wonder that the leading wit in this caſe, whom the others only follow, ſucceeds in his jeſts, and that his apes and followers do not. The former diſplays a greater degree of wit, and his jeſts are new and unexpected: but the latter bring forth

their

their jeſts, after the company is already briſk and chearful, and then their conceits come ſomewhat too late. The one has already reaped the beſt fruits, the others have only the gleanings left, generally ſparing enough. Under this head we might alſo in ſome meaſure reckon the jeſts which are produced in ſilent clubs; the members of which ſeem to meet together for no other end, but to look at each other, and ceaſe from thinking. Such a knot of thoughtleſs phantoms of men may very eaſily be tickled by the moſt inſipid conceit. They think little or nothing, and the ſillieſt trifle may take with them. But a jeſt, cauſing a laugh in that caſe, and conſidered in that view, is very feeble and poor. The jeſter as well as the company think on nothing farther than the jeſt; and thus it is without that beauty and perfection which I have been hitherto conſidering.

CHAP. VI.

THE FIFTH BEAUTY OF A JEST, CERTAINTY.

95. EVERY fine thought ſhould be alſo convincing and perſuaſive, that is, have a degree of certainty. Now as certainty conſiſts in placing the truth of a thing in ſuch a light as that we become conſcious of it, and by ſufficient marks or characters are apprized that the thing is actually as we repreſent it to ourſelves; ſo in general we may eaſily conceive what is requiſite to the certainty of a jocular conceit: namely, that it muſt be true, §. 65---69; and this truth muſt be enlightened by the livelineſs of the jeſt, §. 70---94; that the hearers may become conſcious thereof, and thus be convinced of the juſtneſs of the ludicrous conceit. Now as it is undeniable, that the certainty of a jeſt comprizes a two-

fold

fold perfection, viz. truth and livelineſs; we may the leſs ſcruple to maintain, that a happy jeſt muſt alſo have the due degree of certainty. It will however be unneceſſary to dwell ſo long on this perfection, as I have done on the others. After what I have advanced on the certainty of all our ſenſitive knowledge, little remains to be ſaid here: and if according to the rules hitherto laid down, a jeſt is but ſufficiently juſt and lively, it cannot fall ſhort of the neceſſary degree of truth.

96. For a jocular conceit to have the due degree of certainty, it muſt be a thing altogether clear and undeniable. 1. That what is exhibited as ridiculous in a jeſt, has not only a real exiſtence, but is actually ridiculous. 2. That the objects, by the ingenious compariſon of which the ridiculous is diſcloſed, are actually ſo diſtinguiſhed, as they are diſtinguiſhed in the jeſt. And 3. that they have actually the very coincidence, which they have in the jeſt. A happy jeſt therefore muſt attempt to exhibit all theſe particulars ſo clearly to the

hearers, as to be evidently obſervable in the object; and that the things mutually compared, do alſo mutually coincide, tho' in other reſpects diſtinct from each other; and from this their coincidence, it muſt be evident, that the ridiculous actually exiſts in what gave riſe to the jeſt. The examples of jeſts, hitherto adduced, have alſo this perfection; and I will only illuſtrate theſe rules by an oppoſite example. It is a ſtale and very common jeſt, to call a Preacher, who has no hearers, "the voice of one in "the wilderneſs." To wave at preſent, that this conceit is blame-worthy, as referring to the Bible, and being inconſiſtent with that reverence, we owe to the word of God; I will only remark, that it is deficient in the neceſſary degree of certainty. For, an empty Auditory can never be compared to a wilderneſs, as that word is uſed in the quoted paſſage from the Bible. John the Baptiſt had a vaſt audience, and therefore all the ludicrous here vaniſhes into air, as ſoon as we attend to the compariſon which is made in this conceit.

97. As

97. As often therefore as the truth of a ridiculous conceit is uncertain, improbable, doubtful, or manifeſtly falſe, or that the ingenious compariſon of diſtinct things is not well-grounded, and that the ridiculous has not a real foundation in nature, ſo often is this a defect which damps the fire of a jeſt. No reaſonable perſon will readily laugh without a cauſe; and when any one does ſo, it gives offence. Nay, the laughter may often turn to weeping; as a perſon is juſtly ridiculed who laughs without a reaſon. Now if a ludicrous conceit is without the due degree of certainty, the hearers will be either apprized of its uncertainty or they will not. In the firſt caſe it loſes all its fire, and gains neither approbation nor laughter. In the laſt, it may indeed have all the agreeable effects of a ſprightly jeſt, as long as the hood-winked hearers hold themſelves perſuaded of its juſtneſs; but as ſoon as their eyes are opened, ſo ſoon are they diſpleaſed with themſelves for having approved a jeſt which did not ſufficiently convince them of the ridiculous. It is in general an indi-

dication of a light and childiſh diſpoſition to be ſoon and eaſily provoked to laughter, as ſuch perſons are apt to laugh at things in themſelves no ways ridiculous. Thoſe of a manly turn of mind on will that very account approve my opinion in abſolutely requiring a ſprightly jeſt ſhould have a due degree of certainty; in conſequence of which it ſolidly convinces the mind of the ridicule expoſed. Moſt of the jeſts in common life, which are paſſed on perſons and actions, have the defect of not being ſufficiently certain. In genteel companies, where the characters of abſent neighbours are canvaſſed, a thouſand things are ſaid, without any other proof than, "this is the common report;" to which they are ſure to make ſupplemental additions: and thus the ludicrous conceits, intended to expoſe the innocent, are often grounded on the moſt improbable hear-ſay tales. It is therefore evident, ſuch jeſts labour under a very conſiderable defect.

98. From the foregoing paragraph it appears that a perſon of wit ſhould be on his guard not to expoſe his jeſts to a confutation. For, a jeſt againſt which well-grounded

grounded objections lye, is either falſe, or at leaſt doubtful: and he really acts a very ſilly and ridiculous part, when with great ſelf-ſufficiency and an air of triumph he propoſes a jeſt in a full aſſurance of the general approbation; as another may ſtart up, and confute this conceit, and the jeſter be forced to take ſhame to himſelf. And if the confutation is a ſprightly jeſt, this is a ſting that muſt go to the quick: ſo that a perſon who ſets up for a ſprightly jeſter, ſhould above all things guard againſt ſmart repartees or ludicrous anſwers; eſpecially when made with the view to coufute and expoſe his conceits: as in that caſe the laughers will infallibly be on the opponent's ſide: and nothing is more humbling than when one who wanted to ridicule others is himſelf expoſed. It happened when a Parliament-houſe in France was building, a countryman ſtanding by obſerved with great attention how they went on: Up comes a lawyer with his bags or ſacks to the countryman, and ſays, "Friend, I "am perſuaded, you know not what place "theſe people are building." "True, Sir,

"I

"I wanted to aſk you, ſaid the coun-
"tryman. The lawyer anſwered, a mill;
"I thought ſo, ſaid the countryman, on
"ſeeing an aſs carrying ſacks to it." The lawyer doubtleſs imagined, he diſcovered ſomething ridiculous in the countryman, as he ſtood gaping there. Had he been more cautious to enquire, whether he was really as ſimple as he ſuppoſed him to be, he would not have ventured to attack him, nor have himſelf come off ſo ſcurvily. The readers will certainly join with me in ſaying, that the lawyer's conceit, compared to that of the countryman, is inſipid and flat.

CHAP. VII.

THE SIXTH BEAUTY OF A JEST, CONSISTS IN ITS BEING AFFECTING OR STRIKING.

99. OUR knowledge is affecting and lively when it cauſes pleaſure or diſguſt, or both; deſire or averſion, or both

both at the ſame time. Now a real jeſt muſt excite laughter, §. 24. This is impoſſible, if the witty conceit is no affecting and lively repreſentation. Conſequently it is requiſite to the ſprightlineſs and ſupreme beauty of a ludicrous conceit, to affect and ſtir the minds of the hearers. The art of affecting or ſtriking is a ſtanding beauty in all our ſenſitive knowledge; and thus without further proof it is evident, that a jeſt, to be fine, muſt ſtrike us. Now as jeſts exhibit little things or trifles, it would be ridiculous to affirm, they muſt be poſſeſſed of ſuch a heart-winning force, as that by which important reſolutions are taken, and violent paſſions put in motion. It is ſufficient if they move to the pitch requiſite to cauſe a laugh; and it is well known, great paſſions, ſtrong deſires and averſions may be combined with laughter; but we may laugh heartily tho' the mind be not put into any extraordinary motion.

100. A jeſt, in order to ſtrike us, muſt excite either pleaſure or diſguſt, or both at the ſame time. It would be ridiculous to af-

affirm, that a fine jeſt ſhould cauſe perfect diſguſt, or much more diſguſt than pleaſure. In that caſe it muſt be without all beauty, or have leſs beauty than deformity, and be ſo deformed a repreſentation as to cauſe perfect averſion. The laughing at a jeſt, ariſes from pleaſure; and a ſtriking jeſt muſt therefore cauſe either perfect pleaſure, or however excite more pleaſure than diſguſt. We muſt, indeed, admit, that the perſons who are the ſubjects of jeſts may be diſguſted when expoſed by them. Nay, it may, and muſt alſo often happen, that a ſprightly jeſt ſhall cauſe diſguſt when having a moral end, and for that purpoſe ſomething made ridiculous in order to excite averſion and produce amendment. But a jeſt, conſidered barely in itſelf, muſt always cauſe more pleaſure than diſguſt;

Non ſatis eſt pulchra eſſe poemata, dulcia ſunto,
Et quocunque volent, animùm auditoris agunto.

HORAT.

And

And when a jeſt has raiſed pleaſure and ſatisfaction, we gain a favourable audience and acceptance for ſo agreeable an entertainment. Therefore the more pleaſure a jeſt cauſes, and the more agreeable it is, the finer it certainty is.

101. Pleaſure ariſes from the intuitive knowledge, from the feeling and ſenſe of perfection; as diſguſt, does from the intuitive knowledge of imperfection. A jeſt thus in order ſufficiently to ſtrike, muſt 1. always cauſe a pleaſure from the ſenſe of its beauty. The pleaſure from the jeſt is a natural and infallible conſequence of its beauty. A jeſt poſſeſſed of a ſupreme degree of ſprightlineſs and beauty, adapted to all the rules hitherto advanced, and propoſed in ſuch a manner as to diſplay and make its entire beauty felt, muſt needs pleaſe and produce a ſatisfaction as its fruit and effect. A jeſt which is ſo far from cauſing pleaſure, as rather to cauſe diſguſt muſt either not be beantiful but rather deformed, or not ſufficiently underſtood from inattention, or ſtupidity in the hearer. In

both

both the laſt caſes, it is not the fault of the jeſt if it cauſes no pleaſure: the jeſter rather is blameable, who throws pearls before ſwine. But in the firſt caſe, the languor of a jeſt, cauſing diſguſt rather than pleaſure, is a deformity in it. It is evident, a jeſt muſt pleaſe, if ſufficiently ſprightly, adapted to all the rules of beauty already given, as much as may be, and propoſed to perſons, capable and willing to perceive and feels its beauty. But if a perſon of vivacity, ſprightlineſs and briſkneſs can hear a jeſt without emotion, or rather with diſguſt, it muſt be very inſipid; if his diſguſt be not owing to ſome other cauſe.

——male ſi loqueris,
Aut dormitabo aut ridebo.

HORAT.

2. From the repreſentation of the object of a jeſt, a diſguſt may and muſt often ariſe. A jeſt alway exhibits ſome ridicule or abſurdity. Whoever is actually without theſe may hear with perfect ſatisfaction. But a perſon, whom this ridicule fits, may feel ſome

ſome diſguſt, which alſo is ſuitable to the rational end of ſuch jeſts, namely to bring the perſon to the knowledge of his folly and to amendment. But if he is proud, teſty, and paſſionate, he may be ſo exceedingly diſguſted by the jeſt as to receive no manner of pleaſure from it. But this we cannot blame in a jeſt, without condemning the jeſter, who attempts the amendment of a perſon that neither underſtands nor can bear a jeſt.

102. A jeſt is ſufficiently ſtriking when ſtrongly excititing to laughter, §. 99 But it is neither neceſſary, much leſs poſſible, actually to produce that effect at all times. I have once already hinted that I mean not, a ſprightly jeſt muſt be always accompanied with laughter; or to conclude that a jeſt not ſo accompanied is frigid: nor can we affirm that a jeſt is ſprightly, which has cauſed laughter in ſome. Much leſs can the loudneſs of the laughter conſtitute a characteriſtic of the greatneſs and force of a ſprightly jeſt. It would be abſurd, to conclude, the more laughter a jeſt cauſed, the more

ſprightly is it, and the leſs laughter, the leſs ſprightly. A perſon may be of ſuch a ſerious turn, as ſcarce ever, or but rarely, to laugh; and ſuch a one would refrain laughing on the moſt ſprightly jeſt, tho' never ſo much excited thereto. Many people may perceive in themſelves a very violent inclination to laughter, and yet from other preponderating conſiderations refrain. A perſon is not at all times equally diſpoſed to laugh. One laughs vehemently at inſipid conceits, at a mere trifle, another can only laugh at very ridiculous things. The beauty of a jeſt therefore, aſcribed to it, in reſpect to this effect, viz. its cauſing laughter, muſt be placed in repreſenting what deſerves laughter, and rendering it in ſuch a manner palpable, that a perſon, who does not readily laugh without cauſe, ſhall be moved thereby to riſibility: and then the jeſt is a conceit adapted to cauſe laughter, and more is not requiſite to it, §. 24.

103. A perſon may laugh from diſguſt, and with diſguſt; alſo from pleaſure, and with pleaſure; and thereby cauſe ſuch a

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ſerenity in his own mind as to diſpel all anxious and dejecting thoughts. The laughter of the laſt kind may be compared to the winds, which diſſipate the clouds, drive the vapours out of the air, clear up the heavens and give them a ſmiling aſpect; may excite a ſtrong motion in the mind, capable of producing a briſkneſs and livelineſs, oppoſed to all melancholy dejection. It will be eaſily granted, that the laſt kind of laughter is that which a ſprightly jeſt may produce, as always capable of cauſing at leaſt a preponderating pleaſure, §. 101. The jeſt muſt needs give the mind an agreeable concuſſion, and produce that tickling emotion, we call laughter. When we conſtrain a perſon to an irkſome laugh, he will think himſelf little obliged to us, will arm himſelf againſt us, and collect all his powers to withſtand us, will debar our jeſt all entrance to his mind, highly diſpleaſed both with us and our jeſt. Beſides it muſt be a poor jeſt, poſſeſſed of little beauty, that could not at the ſame time yield a pleaſure. Moreover, pleaſure ſeems to be neceſſarily con-

nected with laughter; as we are leaſt of all capable of jeſting and laughing when dejected and highly diſcontented. In fine, a ſprightly jeſt muſt be adapted to cauſe laughter, accompanied either barely with a ſtrong ſenſitive pleaſure, or at leaſt with a preponderating pleaſure of this kind. It might be alledged, that a pleaſure is connected with all laughter and therefore theſe reflections are unneceſſary. But experience ſhews, that we may many times laugh even when diſguſt predominates over the pleaſure in our mind; for inſtance, in the midſt of violent paſſion. It was neceſſary to ſhew, that ſuch a laughter is not that which is to be intended to be raiſed by a jeſt.

104. It may be alledged, that it is a difficult taſk to unfold the origin of laughter in all its parts; it is ſo complicated a modification and compounded of ſuch an infinite variety of others, that we have juſt grounds to doubt, whether we can ever ſo diſtinctly explain it, as we can other modifications of our mind. I entirely wave the motion of the body, which is connected with

with laughter; as we can ſufficiently explain the beauties of a jeſt without attending to ſuch motion. I ſhall only enquire whence this modification of the ſoul ariſes on laughing at any thing ridiculous; for this is the laughter which is to be raiſed by a jeſt, §. 24. All abſurdities obſervable in minute or trifling things are ridiculous, whether in this reſpect we are deceived or not, there being a genuine and a falſe or barely an apparent ridicule. Laughter thus ariſes from obſerving an abſurdity in minute or trifling things. Cicero ſays in his de Oratore Lib. II. *Locus autem & regio quaſi ridiculi turpitudine & deformitate quadam continetur; hæc enim ridentur vel ſola, vel maxime, quæ notant & deſignant turpitudinem aliquam non turpiter.* It may be very eaſily ſhewn, that every deformity and indecency, of which Cicero here affirms that therein the ridiculous conſiſts, contains ſomething abſurd and contradictory; in regard that nature, when ſhe produces any thing deformed in her works, contradicts thoſe rules ſhe is otherwiſe wont to obſerve as her uſu-

al directory. Every thing deformed, imperfect, or faulty is ſomething contradictory, as it claſhes with the rules of perfection. Cicero remarks in the ſame place, that we are not apt to laugh at a too great deformity and indecency. The firſt ſtirs up to compaſſion; the laſt, to anger and deteſtation. Conſequently, we are then too ſerious to laugh, and if we do, it muſt be with a preponderating diſguſt. Nay, were we to laugh at ſuch great things, we would betray great levity of mind, inconſiſtent with a good taſte. We may therefore with good reaſon aſſert, that to make others laugh with a ſufficient guſt, we are to ſhew them an abſurdity or a contradiction in minute or little things. Experience confirms all theſe reflections. Who would venture to laugh on hearing that one betrayed his country, or was an incendiary? But we laugh at affectation, or little incivilities. Or who would laugh at the ſight of a cripple, maimed almoſt all over his body? But we laugh at an extraordinary long noſe. A certain Embaſſador, viewing the fine bridge built

built by Philip II. of Spain on the Mancanares, a river generally dry, ſaid; "this "bridge ſhould be ſold, to purchaſe water." Here the ridicule in a thing is diſplayed; as it is a folly to build, where a bridge is altogether unneceſſary.

105. A ludicrous conceit, in order powerfully to raiſe laughter, muſt 1. have for its ſubject little trifling objects, no matter whether of a moral or other kind; it is ſufficient if in themſelves, and in their conſequences, they are of no very great moment. For inſtance, peccadilloes little vices, and follies, of no very great detriment to human happineſs; little natural failings and the like. 2. Muſt ſufficiently expoſe any abſurdity, which conſiſts in the deviation of a thing from the rules of its perfection; no matter whether of a moral, or other perfection; it is ſufficient if they are exhibited as irregular, abſurd, deformed, and diſagreeable. And the greater the number of ſuch irregularities expoſed, the more ridiculous the ſubject of the jeſt. The ridiculous may be expoſed different ways; either by a compariſon with

greater or ſmaller objects, or by making a jeſt contradictory on purpoſe, in order to diſplay the abſurdity in the object, &c. As the Duke of Sully was going to Henry the Fourth's apartment he met the King's miſtreſs, who was juſt come from his Majeſty dreſſed in green. As the Duke came in he found the King all in a flutter, and ſaid, your Majeſty's health ſeems to have had ſome ſhock. The King replied, I have had a fever upon me all this morning, and it has but juſt left me. The Duke ſubjoined; "True, "pleaſe your Majeſty, I ſaw it go away "all in green." A fever all in green, is certainly an abſurdity or contradiction; however, the King's excuſe is thereby exhibited in a ridiculous light. I own, it requires a peculiar natural turn to expoſe the ridiculous. There are ſome who cannot diſcover it in objects that are moſt ſo. And whoever is without this natural turn, has no call from nature to jeſt, as ſhe has denied him the neceſſary qualification.

106. A ſprightly jeſt always claims the honour of a rational laugh; but I have already

ready remarked, §. 15, that we are to beware, of accounting every thing which is ridiculous and deſerves to be laughed at, a jeſt; much more of calling whatever cauſes laughter, a jeſt. *Non ſunt omnia ridicula faceta. Cic. de Oratore Lib.* II. In a jeſt in order to be ſprightly, the compariſon of different things together, the ingenious and acute thought, the ludicrous exhibition of the ridiculous, muſt contain the adequate reaſon or motive of laughter. If this reaſon conſiſts in any thing beſides, either it cannot be called a jeſt, or it muſt be a very flat and inſipid one. All frolickſome droll companions, of a mean, low wit, are to be extremely careful of fancying themſelves jocular perſons, if they can produce no other title but their dexterity to ſet people a-laughing: A great deal more is requiſite to a jocular facetious character; the conceits muſt be ingenious, to provoke laughter. The gift of cauſing others to laugh may have its due worth, only we are not to call it the gift of jeſting. An uſurer being on his death-bed,

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his father-confeſſor while exhorting him, held all the time a ſilver crucifix before his eyes; which the uſurer on ſtedfaſtly viewing, ſaid; "I cannot lend much upon it." Doubtleſs, we cannot help laughing at the uſurer; but on telling this ſtory, I cannot boaſt of a jeſt.

107. When a perſon, object, occurrence, action, or whatever other name they may have, are in themſelves manifeſtly ridiculous, without requiring to be further expoſed by an ingenious conceit, the bare narration, or true hiſtorical repreſentation of them, will juſtly cauſe a laugh. But it would be a groſs miſtake to deem ſuch relations, jeſts; or the perſon relating them, a jeſter, even tho' he does it in the moſt dextrous manner imaginable. Indeed, when the materials of our jeſt, are in themſelves ridiculous, it will be an eaſier taſk to find out a ludicrous conceit, and thereby the jeſt may be more ſprightly. But if we only laugh at ſuch ridiculous things, a droll or frolickſome companion is too precipitate in deeming himſelf a perfect jeſter for

for the bare knack of telling ſuch things. This, all perſons fond of droll ſtories ſhould carefully remark.

108. I am ſometimes at a loſs to account why many things that have nothing ridiculous in them, and even tho' told without wit or acumen, ſhould make moſt people burſt out into laughter. Let certain matters be but mentioned which are apt to put modeſt perſons to the bluſh, or things relative to religion, I will engage that many perſons ſhall laugh heartily, tho' without the leaſt ludicrous circumſtance in them. Doubtleſs the reaſon lies in the indelicate and light diſpoſition of mind of the perſons. Obſcenity, and the miſapplication of things, connected with religion, can ſurely never paſs for jeſts, tho' never ſo much the cauſe of laughter in unthinking people. And I have ſhewn above, that ribaldry, tho' ſet off with wit and acumen, muſt never be called jeſts that do a perſon honour: much leſs may we be ſaid to jeſt, when without either wit or acumen we talk obſcenely. And thus in general, all obſcenity, under whatever deno-

denomination, and laughed at never ſo heartily, are too wretched ſtuff for a perſon of decency and purity of manners, to take the trouble of raking up for the purpoſes of a jeſt.

109. A jeſt muſt be inſipid, and not deſerving that appellation, when only cauſing laughter from viewing the jeſter and obſerving his air, geſtures, the poſition and motion of his body. A ſprightly jeſt muſt continue ſuch, tho' the author of it ſhould not be ſeen. I own, indeed, that the manner of telling may contribute much to enhance the beauty of a jeſt, as I ſhall preſently demonſtrate. Be this as it may; a jeſt otherwiſe without any ſprightlineſs, but when ſet off with the droll looks and carriage of the jeſter in telling it, is very inſipid, and neither ingenious nor acute. Such a droll perſon makes himſelf a fool, a harlequin; we laugh at him, not at his jeſt, which is corporal not ſpirituous. We muſt here except Pantomimes, who ſpeak in dumb-ſhow: as by words we can expreſs an ingenious thought, ſo alſo by the air

air, mein, and by the poſition of the body. And I am apt to think a treatiſe on jeſts thus expreſſed would be acceptable.

110. One would be almoſt tempted to think, that nature in forming ſome men was in jeſt; at leaſt not to have proceeded according to her uſual rules. A thouſand little things appear in the very form and make of ſuch droll and anomalous perſons, as cannot be ſeen without laughing; and on barely opening their mouths, they cauſe the loudeſt laughter. Perſons of little judgment imagine jeſting extremely well becomes them: I need not confute this ridiculous error; as it is plain, we in this caſe laugh at their perſon, not their conceit. And I ſhould think, ſuch people leaſt adapted for jeſting in a ſprightly manner, as the drollery in their perſon, will always be a ſtrong ſhade to the beautiful in their jeſts; which are barely ſuch for the eyes and not for the ears.

111. When a droll and ridiculous form is merely a natural defect, it claims our compaſſion and forbearance; but if affected

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in order to make other merry, it deſerves the contempt of all reaſonable perſons. Jeſts, told with a ridiculous and extraordinary ſcrewing of the face, and with unmanly diſtortions of the eyes, noſe, and other features, are fit only to divert the loweſt claſs of people. It is, however, a pity, that many ingenious perſons, who have otherwiſe a happy turn for jeſting, ſhould fall into this extravagance. But as they are guilty of the folly, they muſt be content to go without the appellation of ingenious jeſters. Whoever can ſo far debaſe himſelf, as purpoſely to become ridiculous, does not even deſerve the name of a rational being, and is ſure never to be mentioned but with contempt and deriſion.

112. It is neither poſſible, nor neceſſary to recount and properly chaſtiſe all the follies, men are guilty of in jeſting, and which are nearly allied to what we have already mentioned. Not ſatisfied with diſtorting their faces. many miſapply their bodies to low juggling tricks, put their limbs in unnatural poſtures, and by diſguiſe and other

other low ſhifts, want to give to what they ſay the empty appearance of a jeſt.

——*tunicis*——*eſt qui*
Inguen ad obſcoenum ſubductis, uſque facetus.
HORAT.

Some again are aſſiduouſly employed in taking off, by a childiſh mimickry, the words, air, geſtures and actions of other people, in order to raiſe a laugh. And others expoſe their folly in ſilly ridiculous and unintelligible accents. In a word, I here comprize all who make themſelves ridiculous in jeſting, in what manner ſoever this is done. Whoever will jeſt in a ſprightly manner, muſt above all be careful never to make himſelf ridiculous; muſt maintain his dignity, even amidſt his jeſts, and always follow Cicero's rule; *ne aut ſcurrilis jocus ſit, aut mimicus.*

113. A perſon, who imagines it an eaſy matter to raiſe a rational and decent laugh; and thinks, that he is either wholly or principally to exert himſelf, in order to produce

duce this effect, labours under two very dangerous prejudices.

——*Non ſatis eſt riſu diducere rictum*
Auditoris, & eſt quædam tamen hic quoque
virtus.

HORAT.

From what I have obſerv'd it appears, that much acumen and a great deal of wit are requiſite to raiſe the riſibility of perſons of a fine taſte, without becoming oneſelf ridiculous: and therefore it is highly difficult to cauſe a decent laugh. Again I have endeavoured to ſhew, that in a jeſt we are principally to endeavour to give it all the beauty and ſprightlineſs neceſſary, in order to approbation. But to eſtabliſh both the above prejudices, as maxims in jeſting, would produce, if not conſtantly, yet generally, nothing but buffoonry and low drollery; would put a perſon upon collecting together indiſcriminately every thing ludicrous, and not ſcrupling to employ his own perſon, as a means to the ends of laughter. Only the riſibility produced by an ingenious conceit muſt be made the end in jeſting. Conſequently

quently in the practice, the ingenious conceit, and the beauty neceſſary to it, muſt firſt of all be conſidered; and the laughter, which is but a ſecondary conſideration, will then follow of courſe.

CHAP. VIII.

THE SEVENTH BEAUTY OF A JEST, IS EXPRESSION.

114. THE laſt beauty of a happy jeſt conſiſts in the dextrous and agreeable manner of propoſal or expreſſion. Whether we conſider the expreſſion as one of the eſſential parts of a jeſt, or only as its drapery, it is, however, of very great importance, in order to a happy jeſt. Such a jeſt is a fine ſpeech, in which the facetious conceit is held forth, §. 24. Conſequently, it cannot be perfectly fine, when the manner of it is not good. The manner

of propoſal is to the thought, what the enchaſing or ſetting is to the diamond. Its internal worth or value is, indeed, thereby neither enhanced nor depreſſed; but yet its luſtre is affected, which by a proper ſetting is heightened and promoted, as by an improper one, it is damped and ſuppreſſed. A jeſt may be ſprightly in the higheſt degree, conſidered as a thought; but when propoſed in an aukward clumſy manner, its fire may be ſo deadned or ſuppreſſed, as that little or nothing of it ſhall be perceivable. On the contrary, the fire of a very ordinary jeſt may glow much ſtronger, when properly and agreeably ſet and enchaſed in the expreſſion.

115. In propoſing or uttering our thoughts, we are always to conſider two things; the words and the geſture or action, together with the other modifications, neceſſarily connected with the utterance or elocution. It will here be neceſſary to mention the principal faults generally incurred in the expreſſion of a jeſt and by which its beauty is ſullied, and its fire greatly ſuppreſs-

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ed. The words in which the jocular conceit is expreſſed, are the ſigns, the means, or the channel, by which it is derived from the ſoul of the jeſter to that of the hearer. If the words are therefore ſo qualified, as that the hearer by and from them can diſtinguiſh the whole jeſt with all its beauties, and be brought to a feeling ſenſe thereof, they are ſufficiently fine and faultleſs. The jeſter muſt therefore ſo order his expreſſion, as to leave no beauty of the jeſt concealed and clouded. When he has deviſed a ſprightly jeſt, if he can ſpeak, is maſter of the language, and knows what accents, what elevations and depreſſions of the voice are ſuited to each ſeveral thought, he cannot be at a loſs for a proper utterance.

Verbaque proviſam rem non invita ſequentur.

HORAT.

That expreſſion of a jeſt is blameleſs, in which the entire ludicrous conceit appears in all its pomp and full luſtre. I will only adduce a ſingle rule, both for illuſtration and exemplification. For inſtance, the

propoſal or delivery of a jeſt muſt be quick. If you are too ſlow, and, as it were, telling the words, you cannot quickly and unexpectedly enough ſurpriſe your hearer, and thus the jeſt will fail of being ſufficiently lively and briſk. The time will ſeem long to the hearer, and you leave him too much room for reflection and conſideration. Beſides a drawling and too ſlow an utterance would be a ſhrewd ſign of the ſlowneſs of your wit. Nay, the ſober briſkneſs and warmth of the genius animates even the body, and forces it, in all its actions and words, to obſerve an activity and alacrity, which conſtitute the agreeable mean between an inconſiderate and precipitate hurry, and a phlegmatic and drowſy ſlowneſs. And thus may all the other beauties of the expreſſion of a jeſt be eaſily deduced from its internal beauties.

116. As certain it is, that the coincidence of the air and features of the face is requiſite to a proper and perfect utterance; ſo difficult is it to diſcover and unfold all the rules, by which the countenance is to be

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adjuſted, in order to a perfect expreſſion. Happily for us, nature uſually more than compenſates in ſuch minute particulars, or niceties, the deficiencies of art. *Itaque imbuendus eſt is, qui jocoſe volet dicere, quaſi natura quadam apta ad hæc genera & moribus, ut ad cujuſque modi genus ridiculi vultus etiam accommodetur. Cic. de Orat.* Lib. II. Whoever is bold, free, and unconſtrained in his delivery, not at all, or not over-affected, and feels a lively impreſſion of the ſubject of his delivery; his air and features, on account of the natural harmony between ſoul and body will be moſt adapted to his delivery, when not at all ſollicitous about effecting this harmony or coincidence; all this we affirm of a perſon who jeſts, tho' incapable of giving him full and diſtinct inſtructions how to give the proper adjuſtment to his countenance in jeſting; and yet we may very eaſily diſcover the faults committed in this particular. I will only touch on two, becauſe appearing to be too prejudicial to the ſprightlineſs of a jeſt.

117. The firſt fault or defect of the

countenance is, when a jeſter puts on too gloomy and moroſe an air, a look quite too indifferent and diſguſtful. I have already ſhewn, §. 93, that whoever jeſts muſt put on a ſerious air, which is never moroſe. To tell a jeſt with knit brows and a ſour look may indeed cauſe extraordinary laughter. However, I agree with Cicero: *In moroſo non ſal, ſed natura ridetur.* Gloomy looks betray a moroſe temper, inconſiſtent with ſprightly conceits. Nature, in forming ſuch an one, ſhould ſeem to deviate from her uſual manner, according to which ſhe generally obſerves the ſtricteſt harmony between the ſoul and body. What an odd contraſt would the ſoul of a Democritus, united with the body of a Cato, form!

118. The ſecond defect is, when too much ſelf-complacency ſits on the countenance. This the eyes generally betray, they ſtand ſparkling in the head, and glancing from one to another in the company, and inſiſt with eagerneſs on approbation and laughter. Surprize and reſentment, mixt with contempt, enſue upon the diſappointment;

ment: whence a kind of grudge or deſpite, highly mortifying to the jeſter, ariſes in the minds of the hearers. Jeſters of this temper generally make themſelves contemptible. A reaſonable perſon thinks his tribute of approbation unneceſſary, when prevented therein; from a prejudice, which generally holds true, that a brat, ſo fondled, muſt have many imperfections. Faults therefore, which would be otherwiſe overlooked are carefully ſpied out: nay, faults uſually charged, which in any other, if not altogether paſſed over, are however cenſured with more mildneſs. To jeſt therefore with approbation and applauſe, we are always to put on an air of indifference, at leaſt never to betray any degree of fondneſs.

119. Whoever cannot refrain from laughter in telling a jeſt, makes himſelf ridiculous, loſes that agreeable ſerioufneſs which ſo much heightens a jeſt, prevents the telling it with quickneſs and diſpatch enough to ſurpriſe the hearers, who, before the jeſt is fully out, are apprized of it,

and therefore can never conſider it as new and unexpected: It has all the flatneſs of a jeſt in expectation. Unable to tell it orderly and intelligibly, he breaks off with the ſilly apology, "he cannot tell it for laughing." Laughter may be ſaid to be infectious. The jeſter ſetting it up, the hearers join and bear him company in it: not becauſe he jeſts, but becauſe he laughs; and thus makes himſelf ridiculous. To avoid therefore the weakening, or obſcuring a jeſt, the jeſter muſt never laugh.

120. If allowable at all, it muſt be after the jeſt: yet neither too haſtily or precipitately. To lead the laugh, is as ridiculous in him as the Plaudite in the comedian. The company are called upon to laugh, from a miſtruſt of the jeſt. In general, it is contrary to that air of requiſite ſeriouſneſs, and gives ſuſpicion of too much ſelf-complacency. But to refrain, when the jeſt is ſprightly, and all the company round are laughing, muſt indicate either an extraordinary command of oneſelf, or a very moroſe temper. In ſuch circumſtances

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the jeſter laughing may well be excuſed, as guilty of a ſmall fault: ſo I call it, as a perfect jeſt demands a pleaſant ſeriouſneſs all along. A jeſter gives an extraordinary proof of his penetration, if amidſt a train of ſerious thoughts, he can all on a ſudden break out into a jeſt. Whoever is thus capable, will forbear laughing both after the jeſt, and when all the company round him are laughing. The jeſt ſhould ſeem incidentally introduced; a kind of indifferency about its ſucceſs ſhould appear in the jeſter's air: an indication this, with what eaſe he can jeſt in a ſprightly manner. I wave the cenſure due to the dull jeſter, for laughing at his own low conceits, as I am doubtful whether he does not challenge our compaſſion more than our contempt and ridicule. In contraſt to all other reaſonable beings, he is ſubject to paſſions unknown to them; he laughs when others would weep. If blameable to laugh upon ſprightly, much more upon inſipid, jeſts.

121. It is none of the leaſt imperfections to ſhew too anxious a concern in telling a jeſt. A jeſt, in order to ſucceed, muſt be utter-

uttered with a decent and manly aſſurance, with a boldneſs ariſing from our being conſcious of its excellence and worth. The mean between a ſheepiſh timorouſneſs and an aſſuming ſelf-ſufficiency is carefully to be obſerved. Conceits of an uncommon ſprightlineſs are often told with an anxious repreſſing panick; an univerſal paleneſs overſpreads the face, the reſpiration is diſcompoſed, the anguiſh of heart, which thrills thro' the body, cauſes a tremulous, faultering pronunciation. Such tempers are too ſoft and ſenſible, their mean daſtardlineſs produces too deſponding hopes of a favourable reception: And thus they actually marr jeſts, which in other reſpects are tolerably happy; are incapable of exerting a decent aſſurance in delivery, and of cauſing an unexpected ſurpriſe: nay, excite a kind of anguiſh and uneaſineſs in the minds of the hearers, who ſtand expecting, with ſentiments of diſguſt, a jeſt that has cauſed ſo many throws. Such perſons bewray a feebleneſs of penetration that cannot fail to flatten a conceit, too ſprightly in a perſon

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of a warm complexion; ſeized unexpectedly and ſuddenly ſtruck as he is; in an irreſiſtible manner, he is put into a kind of extaſy, which naturally inſpires a becoming aſſurance. The life and fire of the jeſt animate warm, and put the body all over in a glow, and impart all the ſprightlineſs requiſite to a bold utterance. Whoever is in this reſpect deficient ought to refrain jeſting, in order to avoid ridicule. But then, it is a wild extravagance to lay aſide all reſpect for the company, and boiſterouſly to inſiſt on approbation, as a tribute due.

CONCLUSION.

122. I have now diſcuſſed all the beauties neceſſary, in my opinion, to form a happy jeſt. I pretend not to ſay that nothing requiſite to the perfection of a facetious conceit, has been omitted by me. What I think proper further to hint, will be comprized in a few general remarks. In the firſt place, as I have already ſuggeſted, I mean not, a jeſt can never ſucceed, unleſs ſet off with all the beauties, without

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exception, inſiſted on in this work: I allow ſome jeſts cannot poſſibly admit of them all; as when conſidered in all their circumſtances, ſome of theſe beauties may mutually interfere. But from this, I think, nothing further can be inferred, but that many jeſts cannot attain to that degree of perfection, of which a jeſt, conſidered in general, is capable. It is the ſame in poetry; not every poem is ſuſceptible of every poetical beauty: a reflection, a Critick ſhould well conſider, and not reject and cenſure a jeſt, becauſe deficient in a beauty, till he can ſhew the jeſt was ſuſceptible of it. Moreover, it is evident one ſingle beauty may be ſo conſiderable, ſo ſtrong, ſo ſparkling and ſtriking, as to make the defect of other beauties diſappear. What a jeſt loſes in one kind of beauty, may be abundantly compenſated by the greatneſs of another. And there are defects in a jeſt, which may be eaſily concealed. Nay, we may happen in a company, where many faults may eſcape obſervation.

Non quivis videt immodulata poemata judex.

HORAT.

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There needs only ſome little addreſs and dexterity, in order to paſs for a happy jeſter in companies, not over and above ſtocked with extraordinary genius; if the perſon deſerves to be called ſuch, who by his jeſts has gained the approbation and encomiums of ſuch a company. Learn but the taſte of the company, and avoid the faults deemed ſuch by them, regardleſs of any others, and you will certainly paſs for an ingenious and jocular companion. But to be ſincere, I would never ſeriouſly give this advice: For a perſon to imagine his jeſts luckily hit, when admired in ſuch companies, would be ſilly and ridiculous.

123. The rules above given are alſo the principles, by which to judge of jeſts in a rational manner; and being rules founded on the beauties peculiar to a jeſt, conſtitute the internal principles according to which we are to judge. A jeſt ſo far as it is agreeable to theſe rules, claims our approbation: but ſo far as it is not, tho' capable of being made ſo, calls for our cenſure. The external grounds by which to judge

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of a jeſt, are in general taken from the judgment paſſed by others, and from the impreſſion a jeſt makes on the minds of the hearers: And here much caution is neceſſary. Can we on ſufficient grounds deem a jeſt fine and ſprightly, when commended, approved and admired, and even cauſing laughter? It would be too precipitate a judgment, abſolutely to affirm this. An exceſs of civility and friendſhip may make a perſon commend an inſipid jeſt, only to do us a pleaſure by this piece of complaiſance: or, a perſon may be dependent on us, and owe us reſpect; and it would be imprudent in him to behave otherwiſe: or, he may be a mere paraſite, who flatters out of low ſelfiſh views: or, which is principally to be obſerved, may be one of no abilities and taſte. The moſt ſprightly jeſt will be thrown away on a perſon, who has no diſcernment nor feeling; the flatteſt and moſt inſipid conceit beſt ſuiting his coarſe, unpoliſhed taſte. It is therefore undeniable, that approbation is a very equivocal characteriſtic of a jeſt. But if from it we would draw a

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probable concluſion as to its beauty, it is neceſſary we know, that the perſon commending is himſelf a ſprightly genius, of a refined taſte, and uninfluenced by conſiderations of friendſhip, dependence, or by paraſitical views. And even in that caſe, we are not altogether ſafe, as the moſt witty perſons may many times judge but indifferently.

124. As little can we fairly conclude, thar a jeſt is poor and inſipid, becauſe cenſured, and not making an impreſſion on the minds of perſons who are deſtitute of the abilities to judge and to feel the beautiful in it, and apt to hear the fineſt jeſt without any emotion; which therefore they fail not to cenſure as inſipid; a cenſure ſo very little to be regarded, as even to be conſidered as an indication of the excellence of a jeſt. Again, a perſon may blame out of enmity, diſreſpect to our perſon, out of envy, cenſoriouſneſs, &c. Envy, I know not how, ſeems an hereditary evil in Wits. But where none of theſe failings are chargeable, a perſon of wit may from his preſent ſtate

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of ſeriouſneſs or from ſome diſcompoſure of mind, be incapable of perceiving at that time the beauty of a jeſt. As we are not at all times diſpoſed to jeſt, ſo neither are we always affected with a happy jeſt. Laſtly, difference of taſte may be a cauſe of cenſure.

Laudatur ab his, culpatur ab illis.

HORAT.

But when a perſon of great wit, penetration and ripe judgment, and altogether unbiaſſed, blames, or hears a jeſt without emotion, it is probable the jeſt is flat and inſipid. A great deal more caution is neceſſary, when the jeſter concludes from his own judgment and feeling, as to the beauty or deformity of his own conceits. Vanity and immoderate ſelf-love blind our mind, ſo as to make us inſenſible of our own failings, and to view our perfections thro' a magnifying glaſs. Again, puſillanimity depreſſes us too much in our own eyes, greatly leſſens our perfections and heightens our imperfections. We therefore judge precipitately, when we con-

conclude on the beauty or deformity of a jeſt, from its pleaſing or diſpleaſing ourſelves. But a very ſprightly Genius and of a refined taſte, when raiſed above the infirmities of vanity and puſillanimity, may venture to depend on his own feeling or ſentiment.

125. A jeſt, altogether fine, and without the leaſt deformity, is blameleſs, and ſtands foremoſt in beauty. But it would be unfair to require all jeſts to be of this character. A jeſt, which is at the ſame time beautiful and deformed, may claim the approbation of judges; only its deformity muſt neither equal nor exceed its beauty. A jeſt with more and greater deformities than beauties, reſembles a fire which cauſes much ſmoke: tho' the ſmoke abates nothing of the force of the fire, yet it covers the fire, prevents its ſplendor and the effects thereof, from ſpreading to that extent, and with that force, they otherwiſe would. We in reaſon judge of the perfections and imperfections of a thing, according as the one or other preponderate: If the imperfections do ſo in a remarkable manner, we

cannot but repreſent to ourſelves the deformed ſide in a clearer, diſtincter and more ſtriking manner, and gradually loſe ſight of the beautiful ſide. Conſequently, we juſtly cenſure and reject a thing which is more deformed than beautiful. A jeſt therefore, in order to ſucceed, muſt have beauties at leaſt that preponderate its deformities; but is abſolutely better, if without the laſt. Here again I may inſtance in profane irreligious jeſts; which, on no account, can have much beauty or fire. But as impiety and levity, which give riſe to them, are crimes, which in this caſe are carried almoſt to their utmoſt pitch; they can never pleaſe, never be commended, but by either the irreligious or the thoughtleſs.

126. Such ſprightly jeſts are doubtleſs the fineſt which cauſe pure delight only. However, as a jeſt may be fine, tho' cauſing both pleaſure and pain, yet the pleaſure muſt be at leaſt greater than the pain. A jeſt therefore, which cauſes as much or more pain than pleaſure, is juſtly cenſurable, as being frigid, or its pain preponderating. No one is ſo void of reaſon, as to pur-

purchaſe a trifling pleaſure at the expence of a greater pain. The pain, in ſuch a caſe will probably obſcure and ſtifle the feebler pleaſure of the jeſt; conſequently, deſtroy the foundation of the pleaſure, or the intuitive view of the beauties of the jeſt; which will be loſt, as it were, in its deformities, and be as if they were not. But when the pleaſure of a jeſt preponderates the pain, the reverſe holds true: the deformed ſide will then diſappear, and be entirely covered by the beautiful. At leaſt we readily undergo a ſmall pain, if made up, and compenſated by a greater pleaſure. Hence perſons who are in a good friendſhip together ſcruple not to banter and jeſt each other with freedom: whereas it would be unacceptable to banter in the fineſt manner, where the ties of friendſhip are ſo feeble, as to prevent the pleaſure from preponderating the pain. It cannot be denied, that the practice of this rule calls for much ſkill and addreſs. One man may feel a great deal of pain, at what another feels none at all, or very little: and the ſame is true as to pleaſure. But be this as it may: the jeſter muſt abſolute-

ſolutely ſuit himſelf to the hearer, in order to attain his end. Here again, as an inſtance, I reckon laſcivious, ſmutty, lewd jeſts, which excite in the hearer's imagination obſcene and loathſome images. I leave every reaſonable perſon to judge, whether the ſprightlieſt jeſts muſt not loſe in luſtre, when enchaſed in ſo dirty a manner? A facetious perſon, wading too often in this dirt, may pleaſe perſons of low breeding and taſte, but never thoſe of decency and good manners.

127. Let us now put a Period to theſe reflections. Whoever has not received from the hands of nature the gift for jeſting, let him never venture upon it, tho' he could perfectly conn over the whole of my book. This will avail him nothing, at moſt teach him to jeſt but in a forced and affected manner. *Ego in his præceptis hanc vim, & hanc utilitatem eſſe arbitror, non ut ad reperiendum quid dicamus, arte ducamur; ſed ut ea, quæ natura, quæ ſtudio, quæ exercitatione conſequimur, aut recta eſſe confidamus, aut prava intelligamus, quum quo referenda ſint*

ſint, didicerimus. Cic. de Orat. Lib. II.

I form to myſelf the good hopes, that theſe pages will not be altogether unuſeful in order to promote a good taſte. At leaſt I have endeavoured to eſtabliſh theſe reflections upon ſure and ſolid grounds; viz. the nature of the ſoul, and of beauty in general. But if any one is ſo minded, he is at full liberty for me, to proſecute this ſubject, at greater length than I have here done.

Vive, vale, ſi quid noviſti rectius iſtis,
Candidus imperti, ſi non, his utere mecum.

FINIS.

6 MA 50

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HORAT.